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# “ I SAY NO ”

BY

WILKIE COLLINS



*IN THREE VOLUMES*

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1884

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Book the Second—*(continued, :*

IN LONDON.



# “I SAY NO.”

*BOOK THE SECOND—(continued):*

*In London.*

## CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS REDWOOD.

“I got invited to Sir Jervis’s house,” Alban resumed, “by treating the old savage as unceremoniously as he had treated me. ‘That’s an idle trade of yours,’ he said, looking at my sketch. ‘Other ignorant people have made the same remark,’ I answered. He rode away, as if he was not used to be spoken to in that manner, and then thought better of it, and came back.

‘Do you understand wood engraving?’ he asked. ‘Yes.’ ‘And etching?’ ‘I have practised etching myself.’ ‘Are you a Royal Academician?’ ‘I’m a drawing-master at a ladies’ school.’ ‘Whose school?’ ‘Miss Ladd’s.’ ‘Damn it, you know the girl who ought to have been my secretary.’ I am not quite sure whether you will take it as a compliment—Sir Jervis appeared to view you in the light of a reference to my respectability. At any rate, he went on with his questions. ‘How long do you stop in these parts?’ ‘I haven’t made up my mind.’ ‘Look here; I want to consult you—are you listening?’ ‘No; I’m sketching.’ He burst into a horrid scream. I asked if he felt himself taken ill. ‘Ill?’ he said—‘I’m laughing.’ It was a diabolical laugh, in one syllable—not ‘ha! ha! ha!’; only ‘ha!’—and it made him look wonderfully like that emi-

nent person, whom I persist in thinking he resembles. 'You're an impudent dog,' he said; 'where are you living?' He was so delighted when he heard of my uncomfortable position in the kennel-bedroom, that he offered his hospitality on the spot. 'I can't go to you in such a pigstye as that,' he said; 'you must come to me. What's your name?' 'Alban Morris; what's your's?' 'Jervis Redwood. Pack up your traps when you've done your job, and come and try my kennel. There it is, in a corner of your drawing, and devilish like, too.' I packed up my traps, and I tried his kennel. And now you have had enough of Sir Jervis Redwood."

"Not half enough!" Emily answered. "Your story leaves off just at the interesting moment. I want you to take me to Sir Jervis's house."

"And I want you, Miss Emily, to take

me to the British Museum. Don't let me startle you! When I called here earlier in the day, I was told that you had gone to the reading-room. Is your reading a secret?"

His manner, when he made that reply, suggested to Emily that there was some foregone conclusion in his mind, which he was putting to the test. She answered without alluding to the impression which he had produced on her.

"My reading is no secret. I am only consulting old newspapers."

He repeated the last words to himself. "Old newspapers?" he said—as if he was not quite sure of having rightly understood her.

She tried to help him by a more definite reply.

"I am looking through old newspapers," she resumed, "beginning with the year eighteen hundred and seventy-six."

“And going back from that time,” he asked eagerly, “to earlier dates still?”

“No—just the contrary—advancing from ‘seventy-six’ to the present time.”

He suddenly turned pale—and tried to hide his face from her by looking out of the window. For a moment, his agitation deprived him of his presence of mind. In that moment, she saw that she had alarmed him.

“What have I said to frighten you?” she asked.

He tried to assume a tone of commonplace gallantry. “There are limits even to your power over me,” he replied. “Whatever else you may do, you can never frighten me. Are you searching those old newspapers with any particular object in view?”

“Yes.”

“May I know what it is?”

"May I know why I frightened you?"

He began to walk up and down the room again—then checked himself abruptly, and appealed to her mercy.

"Don't be hard on me," he pleaded. "I am so fond of you—oh, forgive me! I only mean that it distresses me to have any concealments from you. If I could open my whole heart at this moment, I should be a happier man."

She understood him and believed him. "My curiosity shall never embarrass you again," she answered warmly. "I won't even remember that I wanted to hear how you got on in Sir Jervis's house."

His gratitude seized the opportunity of taking her harmlessly into his confidence. "As Sir Jervis's guest," he said, "my experience is at your service. Only tell me how I can interest you."

She replied, with some hesitation, "I



should like to know what happened when you first saw Mrs. Rook." To her surprise and relief, he at once complied with her wishes.

"We met," he said, "on the evening when I first entered the house. Sir Jervis took me into the dining-room — and there sat Miss Redwood, with a large black cat on her lap. Older than her brother, taller than her brother, leaner than her brother — with strange stony eyes, and a skin like parchment — she looked (if I may speak in contradictions) like a living corpse. I was presented, and the corpse revived. The last lingering relics of former good breeding showed themselves faintly in her bow and in her smile. You will hear more of Miss Redwood presently. In the meanwhile, Sir Jervis made me reward his hospitality by professional advice. He wished me to decide whether the artists, whom he had

employed to illustrate his wonderful book, had cheated him by overcharges and bad work—and Mrs. Rook was sent to fetch the engravings from his study upstairs. You remember her petrified appearance, when she first read the inscription on your locket? The same result followed when she found herself face to face with me. I saluted her civilly—she was deaf and blind to my politeness. Her master snatched the illustrations out of her hand, and told her to leave the room. She stood stockstill, staring helplessly. Sir Jervis looked round at his sister; and I followed his example. Miss Redwood was observing the housekeeper too attentively to notice anything else; her brother was obliged to speak to her. ‘Try Rook with the bell,’ he said. Miss Redwood took a fine old bronze hand-bell from the table at her side, and rang it. At the shrill silvery sound of the bell, Mrs.

Rook put her hand to her head as if the ringing had hurt her—turned instantly, and left us. ‘Nobody can manage Rook but my sister,’ Sir Jervis explained; ‘Rook is crazy.’ Miss Redwood differed with him. ‘No!’ she said. Only one word, but there were volumes of contradiction in it. Sir Jervis looked at me slyly; meaning perhaps, that he thought his sister crazy, too. The dinner was brought in at the same moment, and my attention was diverted to Mrs. Rook’s husband.”

“What was he like?” Emily asked.

“I really can’t tell you; he was one of those essentially commonplace persons, whom one never looks at a second time. His dress was shabby, his head was bald, and his hands shook when he waited on us at table—and that is all I remember. Sir Jervis and I feasted on salt fish, mutton, and beer. Miss Redwood had cold broth,

with a wine-glass full of rum poured into it by Mr. Rook. 'She's got no stomach,' her brother informed me; 'hot things come up again ten minutes after they have gone down her throat; she lives on that beastly mixture, and calls it broth-grog!' Miss Redwood sipped her elixir of life, and occasionally looked at me with an appearance of interest which I was at a loss to understand. Dinner being over, she rang her antique bell. The shabby old man-servant answered her call. 'Where's your wife?' she inquired. 'Ill, Miss.' She took Mr. Rook's arm to go out, and stopped as she passed me. 'Come to my room, if you please, sir, to-morrow at two o'clock,' she said. Sir Jervis explained again: 'She's all to pieces in the morning' (he invariably called his sister 'She'); 'and gets patched up towards the middle of the day. Death has forgotten her, that's about the truth of it.' He lit his

pipe, and pondered over the hieroglyphics found among the ruined cities of Yucatan ; I lit my pipe, and read the only book I could find in the dining-room—a dreadful record of shipwrecks and disasters at sea. When the room was full of tobacco-smoke we fell asleep in our chairs—and when we woke again, we got up and went to bed. There is the true story of my first evening at Redwood Hall.”

Emily begged him to go on. “You have interested me in Miss Redwood,” she said. “You kept your appointment, of course?”

“I kept my appointment in no very pleasant humour. Encouraged by my favourable report of the illustrations which he had submitted to my judgment, Sir Jervis proposed to make me useful to him in a new capacity. ‘You have nothing particular to do,’ he said, ‘suppose you

clean my pictures?' I gave him one of my black looks, and made no other reply. My interview with his sister tried my powers of self-command in another way. Miss Redwood declared her purpose in sending for me the moment I entered her room. Without any preliminary remarks—speaking slowly and emphatically, in a wonderfully strong voice for a woman of her age—she said, 'I have a favour to ask of you, sir. I want you to tell me what Mrs. Rook has done.' I was so staggered that I stared at her like a fool. She went on: 'I suspected Mrs. Rook, sir, of having guilty remembrances on her conscience before she had been a week in our service.' Can you imagine my astonishment when I heard that Miss Redwood's view of Mrs. Rook was my view? Finding that I still said nothing, the old lady entered into details: 'We arranged, sir'

(she persisted in calling me ‘sir,’ with the formal politeness of the old school)—‘we arranged, sir, that Mrs. Rook and her husband should occupy the bedroom next to mine, so that I might have her near me in case of my being taken ill in the night. She looked at the door between the two rooms—suspicious! She asked if there was any objection to her changing to another room—suspicious! suspicious! Pray take a seat, sir, and tell me which Mrs. Rook is guilty of—theft or murder?’

“What a dreadful old woman!” Emily exclaimed. “How did you answer her?”

“I told her, with perfect truth, that I knew nothing of Mrs. Rook’s secrets. Miss Redwood’s humour took a satirical turn. ‘Allow me to ask, sir, whether your eyes were shut, when our housekeeper found herself unexpectedly in your presence?’ I referred the old lady to her brother’s

opinion. ‘Sir Jervis believes Mrs. Rook to be crazy,’ I reminded her. ‘Do you refuse to trust me, sir?’ ‘I have no information to give you, Madam.’ She waved her skinny old hand in the direction of the door. I made my bow, and retired. She called me back. ‘Old women used to be prophets, sir, in the bygone time,’ she said. ‘I will venture on a prediction. You will be the means of depriving us of the services of Mr. and Mrs. Rook. If you will be so good as to stay here a day or two longer, you will hear that those two people have given us notice to quit. It will be her doing, mind—he is a mere cypher. I wish you good morning.’ Will you believe me, when I tell you that the prophecy was fulfilled?”

“Do you mean that they actually left the house?”

“They would certainly have left the house,”



Alban answered, "if Sir Jervis had not insisted on receiving the customary month's warning. He asserted his resolution by locking up the old husband in the pantry. His sister's suspicions never entered his head; the housekeeper's conduct (he said) simply proved that she was, what he had always considered her to be, crazy. 'A capital servant, in spite of that drawback,' he remarked; 'and, you will see, I shall bring her to her senses.' The impression produced on me was naturally of a very different kind. While I was still uncertain how to entrap Mrs. Rook into confirming my suspicions, she herself had saved me the trouble. She had placed her own guilty interpretation on my appearance in the house—I had driven her away!"

Emily remained true to her resolution not to let her curiosity embarrass Alban again. But the unexpressed question was in her

thoughts — "Of what guilt does he suspect Mrs. Rook? And, when he first felt his suspicions, was my father in his mind?"

Alban proceeded.

"I had only to consider next, whether I could hope to make any further discoveries, if I continued to be Sir Jervis's guest. The object of my journey had been gained; and I had no desire to be employed as picture-cleaner. Miss Redwood assisted me in arriving at a decision. I was sent for to speak to her again. The success of her prophecy had raised her spirits. She asked, with ironical humility, if I proposed to honour them by still remaining their guest, after the disturbance that I had provoked. I answered that I proposed to leave by the first train the next morning. 'Will it be convenient for you to travel to some place at a good distance from this part of the world?' she asked. I had my own reasons for going to

London, and said so. ‘Will you mention that to my brother this evening, just before we sit down to dinner?’ she continued. ‘And will you tell him plainly that you have no intention of returning to the North? I shall make use of Mrs. Rook’s arm, as usual, to help me downstairs—and I will take care that she hears what you say. Without venturing on another prophecy, I will only hint to you that I have my own idea of what will happen; and I should like you to see for yourself, sir, whether my anticipations are realised.’ Need I tell you that this strange old woman proved to be right once more? Mr. Rook was released; Mrs. Rook made humble apologies, and laid the whole blame on her husband’s temper; and Sir Jervis bade me remark that his method had succeeded in bringing the housekeeper to her senses. Such were the results produced by the announcement of my departure for

London—purposely made in Mrs. Rook's hearing. Do you agree with me, that my journey to Northumberland has not been taken in vain?"

Once more, Emily felt the necessity of controlling herself.

Alban had said that he had "reasons of his own for going to London." Could she venture to ask him what those reasons were? She could only persist in restraining her curiosity, and conclude that he would have mentioned his motive, if it had been (as she had at one time supposed) connected with herself. It was a wise decision. No earthly consideration would have induced Alban to answer her, if she had put the question to him.

All doubt of the correctness of his own first impression was now at an end; he was convinced that Mrs. Rook had been an accomplice in the crime committed, in 1877, at the

village inn. His object in travelling to London was to consult the newspaper narrative of the murder. He, too, had been one of the readers at the Museum—had examined the back numbers of the newspaper—and had arrived at the conclusion that Emily's father had been the victim of the crime. Unless he found means to prevent it, her course of reading would take her from the year 1876 to the year 1877, and under that date, she would see the fatal report, heading the top of a column, and printed in conspicuous type.

In the meanwhile, Emily had broken the silence, before it could lead to embarrassing results, by asking if Alban had seen Mrs. Rook again, on the morning when he left Sir Jervis's house.

“There was nothing to be gained by seeing her,” Alban replied. “Now that she and her husband had decided to remain

at Redwood Hall, I knew where to find her in case of necessity. As it happened I saw nobody, on the morning of my departure, but Sir Jervis himself. He still held to his idea of having his pictures cleaned for nothing. 'If you can't do it yourself,' he said, 'couldn't you teach my secretary?' He described the lady whom he has engaged in your place, as 'a nasty middle-aged woman with a perpetual cold in her head.' At the same time (he remarked) he was a friend to the women, 'because he got them cheap.' I declined to teach the unfortunate secretary the art of picture-cleaning. Finding me determined, Sir Jervis was quite ready to say good-bye. But he made use of me to the last. He employed me as postman and saved a stamp. The letter addressed to you arrived at breakfast time. Sir Jervis said, 'You're going to London; suppose you take it with you?'"

“Did he tell you that there was a letter of his own enclosed in the envelope?”

“No. When he gave me the envelope it was already sealed.”

Emily at once handed to him Sir Jervis's letter. “That will tell you who employs me at the Museum, and what my work is,” she said.

He looked through the letter, and at once offered—eagerly offered—to help her.

“I have been a student in the reading-room at intervals, for years past,” he said. “Let me assist you, and I shall have something to do in my holiday time.” He was so anxious to be of use, that he interrupted her before she could thank him. “Let us take alternate years,” he suggested. “Did you not tell me you were searching the newspapers published in eighteen hundred and seventy-six?”

“Yes.”

"Very well. I will take the next year. You will take the year after. And so on."

"You are very kind," she answered—"but I should like to propose an improvement on your plan."

"What improvement?" he asked, rather sharply.

"If you will leave the five years, from 'seventy-six to 'eighty-one, entirely to me," she resumed, "and take the next five years, reckoning *backwards* from 'seventy-six, you will help me to better purpose. Sir Jervis expects me to look for reports of Central American Explorations, through the newspapers of the last forty years; and I have taken the liberty of limiting the heavy task imposed on me. When I report my progress to my employer, I should like to say that I have got through ten years of the examination, instead of five. Do you see any objection to the arrangement I propose?"



He proved to be obstinate—incomprehensibly obstinate.

“Let us try my plan to begin with,” he insisted. “While you are looking through ’seventy-six, let me be at work on ’seventy-seven. If you still prefer your own arrangement, after that, I will follow your suggestion with pleasure. Is it agreed?”

Her acute perception—enlightened by his tone as well as by his words—detected something under the surface already.

“It isn’t agreed until I understand you a little better,” she quietly replied. “I fancy you have some object of your own in view.”

She spoke with her usual directness of look and manner. He was evidently disconcerted. “What makes you think so?” he asked.

“My own experience of myself makes me think so,” she answered. “If *I* had

some object to gain, I should persist in carrying it out—like you."

"Does that mean, Miss Emily, that you refuse to give way?"

"No, Mr. Morris. I have made myself disagreeable, but I know when to stop. I trust you—and submit."

If he had been less deeply interested in the accomplishment of his merciful design, he might have viewed Emily's sudden submission with some distrust. As it was, his eagerness to prevent her from discovering the narrative of the murder hurried him into an act of indiscretion. He made an excuse to leave her immediately, in the fear that she might change her mind.

"I have inexcusably prolonged my visit," he said. "If I presume on your kindness in this way, how can I hope that you will receive me again? We meet to-morrow in the reading-room."

He hastened away, as if he was afraid to let her say a word in reply.

Emily reflected.

“Is there something he doesn’t want me to see, in the news of the year ’seventy-seven?” The one explanation which suggested itself to her mind assumed that form of expression—and the one method of satisfying her curiosity that seemed likely to succeed, was to search the volume which Alban had reserved for his own reading.

For two days they pursued their task together, seated at opposite desks. On the third day Emily was absent.

Was she ill?

She was at a library in the City, consulting the file of *The Times* for the year 1877.

*"I SAY NO."*

## CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. ROOK.

EMILY's first day in the City library proved to be a day wasted.

She began reading the back-numbers of the newspaper at haphazard, without any definite idea of what she was looking for. Conscious of the error into which her own impatience had led her, she was at a loss how to retrace the false step that she had taken. But two alternatives presented themselves: either to abandon the hope of making any discovery—or to attempt to penetrate Alban's motives by means of pure guess-work, pursued in the dark.

How was the problem to be solved? This serious question troubled her all through the evening, and kept her awake when she went to bed. In despair of her capacity to remove the obstacle that stood in her way, she decided on resuming her regular work at the Museum—turned her pillow to get at the cool side of it—and made up her mind to go to sleep.

In the case of the wiser animals, the Person submits to Sleep. It is only the superior human being who tries the hopeless experiment of making Sleep submit to the Person. Wakeful on the warm side of the pillow, Emily remained wakeful on the cool side—thinking again and again of the interview with Alban which had ended so strangely.

Little by little, her mind passed the limits which had restrained it thus far. Alban's conduct in keeping his secret, in the matter

of the newspapers, now began to associate itself with Alban's conduct in keeping that other secret, which concealed from her his suspicions of Mrs. Rook.

She started up in bed as the next possibility occurred to her.

In speaking of the disaster which had compelled Mr. and Mrs. Rook to close the inn, Cecilia had alluded to an inquest held on the body of the murdered man. Had the inquest been mentioned in the newspapers, at the time? And had Alban seen something in the report, which concerned Mrs. Rook?

Led by the new light that had fallen on her, Emily returned to the library the next morning, with a definite idea of what she had to look for. Incapable of giving exact dates, Cecilia had informed her that the crime was committed "in the autumn." The month to choose, in beginning her

examination, was therefore the month of August.

No discovery rewarded her. She tried September, next—with the same unsatisfactory result. On Monday the first of October, she met with some encouragement at last. At the top of a column appeared a telegraphic summary of all that was then known of the crime. In the number for the Wednesday following, she found a full report of the proceedings at the inquest.

Passing over the preliminary remarks, Emily read the evidence with the closest attention.

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The jury having viewed the body, and having visited an outhouse in which the murder had been committed, the first witness called was Mr. Benjamin Rook, landlord of the Hand-in-Hand inn.

On the evening of Sunday, September

30th, 1877, two gentlemen presented themselves at Mr. Rook's house, under circumstances which especially excited his attention.

The youngest of the two was short, and of fair complexion. He carried a knapsack, like a gentleman on a pedestrian excursion; his manners were pleasant; and he was decidedly good-looking. His companion, older, taller, and darker—and a finer man altogether—leaned on his arm, and seemed to be exhausted. In every respect, they were singularly unlike each other. The younger stranger (excepting little half whiskers) was clean shaved. The elder wore his whole beard. Not knowing their names, the landlord distinguished them, at the coroner's suggestion, as the fair gentleman, and the dark gentleman.

It was raining when the two arrived



at the inn. There were signs in the heavens of a stormy night.

On accosting the landlord, the fair gentleman volunteered the following statement:

Approaching the village, he had been startled by seeing the dark gentleman (a total stranger to him) stretched prostrate on the grass at the roadside—so far as he could judge, in a swoon. Having a flask with brandy in it, he revived the fainting man, and led him to the inn.

This statement was confirmed by a labourer, who was on his way to the village at the time.

The dark gentleman endeavoured to explain what had happened to him. He had, as he supposed, allowed too long a time to pass (after an early breakfast that morning), without taking food: he could only attribute the fainting fit to

that cause. He was not liable to fainting fits. What purpose (if any) had brought him into the neighbourhood of Zeeland, he did not state. He had no intention of remaining at the inn, except for refreshment; and he asked for a carriage to take him to the railway station.

The fair gentleman, seeing the signs of bad weather, desired to remain in Mr. Rook's house for the night, and proposed to resume his walking tour the next day.

Excepting the case of supper, which could be easily provided, the landlord had no choice but to disappoint both his guests. In his small way of business, none of his customers wanted to hire a carriage—even if he could have afforded to keep one. As for beds, the few rooms which the inn contained were all engaged; including even the room occupied by himself and his wife. An exhibition of agricultural implements

had been opened in the neighborhood, only two days since; and a public competition between rival machines was to be decided on the coming Monday. Not only was the Hand-in-Hand inn crowded, but even the accommodation, offered by the nearest town, had proved barely sufficient to meet the public demand.

The gentlemen looked at each other, and agreed that there was no help for it but to hurry the supper, and walk to the railway-station—a distance of between five and six miles—in time to catch the last train.

While the meal was being prepared, the rain held off for awhile. The dark man asked his way to the post-office, and went out by himself.

He came back in about ten minutes, and sat down afterwards to supper with his companion. Neither the landlord, nor any other person in the public room, noticed

any change in him on his return. He was a grave quiet sort of person, and (unlike the other one) not much of a talker.

As the darkness came on, the rain fell again heavily ; and the heavens were black.

A flash of lightning startled the gentlemen when they went to the window to look out : the thunder-storm began. It was simply impossible that two strangers to the neighbourhood could find their way to the station, through storm and darkness, in time to catch the train. With or without bedrooms, they must remain at the inn for the night.

Having already given up their own room to their lodgers, the landlord and landlady had no other place to sleep in than the kitchen. Next to the kitchen, and communicating with it by a door, was an outhouse ; used, partly as a scullery, partly as a lumber-room. There was an old

truckle-bed among the lumber, on which one of the gentlemen might rest. A mattress on the floor could be provided for the other. After adding a table and a basin, for the purposes of the toilet, the accommodation which Mr. Rook was able to offer, came to an end.

The travellers agreed to occupy this make-shift bedchamber.

The thunderstorm passed away; but the rain continued to fall heavily. Soon after eleven the guests at the inn retired for the night. There was some little discussion between the two travellers, as to which of them should take possession of the truckle-bed. It was put an end to by the fair gentleman, in his own pleasant way. He proposed to "toss up for it"—and he lost. The dark gentleman went to bed first; the fair gentleman followed, after waiting awhile. Mr. Rook took his knapsack into

the outhouse ; and arranged on the table his appliances for the toilet—contained in a leather roll, and including a razor—ready for use in the morning.

Having previously barred the second door of the outhouse which led into the yard, Mr. Rook fastened the other door, the lock and bolts of which were on the side of the kitchen. He then secured the house door, and the shutters over the lower windows. Returning to the kitchen, he noticed that the time was ten minutes short of midnight. Soon afterwards, he and his wife went to bed.

Nothing happened to disturb Mr. and Mrs. Rook during the night.

At a quarter to seven the next morning, he got up ; his wife being still asleep. He had been instructed to wake the gentlemen early ; and he knocked at their door. Receiving no answer, after repeatedly knock-

ing, he opened the door and stepped into the outhouse.

At this point in his evidence, the witness's recollections appeared to overpower him. "Give me a moment, gentlemen," he said to the jury. "I have had a dreadful fright; and I don't believe I shall get over it for the rest of my life."

The coroner helped him by a question: "What did you see when you opened the door?"

Mr. Rook answered: "I saw the dark man stretched out on his bed—dead, with a frightful wound in his throat. I saw an open razor, stained with smears of blood, at his side."

"Did you notice the door, leading into the yard?"

"It was wide open, sir. When I was able to look round me, the other traveller—I mean the man with the fair complexion,

who carried the knapsack—was nowhere to be seen."

"What did you do, after making these discoveries?"

"I closed the yard door. Then, I locked the other door, and put the key in my pocket. After that I roused the servant, and sent him to the constable—who lived near to us—while I ran for the doctor, whose house was at the other end of our village. The doctor sent his groom, on horseback, to the police-office in the town. When I returned to the inn, the constable was there—and he and the police took the matter into their own hands."

"You have nothing more to tell us?"

"Nothing more."



## CHAPTER XXV.

"J. B."

MR. ROOK having completed his evidence, the police authorities were the next witnesses examined.

They had not found the slightest trace of any attempt to break into the house in the night. The murdered man's gold watch and chain were discovered under his pillow. On examining his clothes the money was found in his purse, and the gold studs and sleeve buttons were left in his shirt. But his pocket-book (seen by witnesses who had not yet been examined) was missing. The search for visiting cards and letters had proved to

be fruitless. Only the initials, "J. B." were marked on his linen. He had brought no luggage with him to the inn. Nothing could be found which led to the discovery of his name or of the purpose which had taken him into that part of the country.

The police examined the outhouse next, in search of circumstantial evidence against the missing man.

He must have carried away his knapsack, when he took to flight; but he had been (probably) in too great a hurry to look for his razor—or perhaps too terrified to touch it, if it had attracted his notice. The leather roll, and the other articles used for his toilet, had been taken away. Mr. Rook identified the bloodstained razor. He had noticed overnight the name of the Belgian city, "Liege," engraved on it.

The yard was the next place inspected. Footsteps were found on the muddy earth,

up to the wall. But the road on the other side had been recently mended with stones, and the trace of the fugitive was lost. Casts had been taken of the footsteps; and no other means of discovery had been left untried. The authorities in London had also been communicated with by telegraph.

The doctor being called, described a personal peculiarity, which he had noticed at the post-mortem examination, and which might lead to the identification of the murdered man.

As to the cause of death, the witness said it could be stated in two words. The internal jugular vein had been cut through, with such violence, judging by the appearances, that the wound could not have been inflicted, in the act of suicide, by the hand of the deceased person. No other injuries, and no sign of disease, were found on the body. The one cause of death had been

Hemorrhage; and the one peculiarity which called for notice had been discovered in the mouth. Two of the front teeth, in the upper jaw, were false. They had been so admirably made to resemble the natural teeth on either side of them, in form and colour, that the witness had only hit on the discovery by accidentally touching the inner side of the gum with one of his fingers.

The landlady was examined, when the doctor had retired. Mrs. Rook was able, in answering questions put to her, to give important information, in reference to the missing pocket-book.

Before retiring to rest, the two gentlemen had paid the bill—intending to leave the inn the first thing in the morning. The traveller with the knapsack paid his share in money. The other unfortunate gentleman looked into his purse, and found only a shilling and a sixpence in it. He asked Mrs. Rook if she

could change a bank-note. She told him it could be done, provided the note was for no considerable sum of money. Upon that he opened his pocket-book (which the witness described minutely), and turned out the contents on the table. After searching among many Bank of England notes, some in one pocket of the book and some in another, he found a note of the value of five pounds. He thereupon settled his bill, and received the change from Mrs. Rook—her husband being in another part of the room, attending to the guests. She noticed a letter in an envelope, and a few cards, which looked (to her judgment) like visiting cards, among the bank-notes which he had turned out on the table. When she returned to him with the change, he had just put them back, and was closing the pocket-book. She saw him place it in one of the breast-pockets of his coat.

The fellow traveller who had accompanied him to the inn was present all the time, sitting on the opposite side of the table. He made a remark when he saw the notes produced. He said, "Put all that money back—don't tempt a poor man like me!" It was said laughing, as if by way of a joke.

Mrs. Rook had observed nothing more that night; had slept as soundly as usual; and had been awakened when her husband knocked at the outhouse-door, according to instructions received from the gentlemen, overnight.

Three of the guests in the public room, corroborated Mrs. Rook's evidence. They were respectable persons, well and widely known in that part of Hampshire. Besides these, there were two strangers staying in the house. They referred the coroner to their employers—eminent manufacturers

at Sheffield and Wolverhampton—whose testimony spoke for itself.

The last witness called was a grocer in the village, who kept the post office.

On the evening of the 30th, a dark gentleman, wearing his beard, knocked at the door, and asked for a letter addressed to "J. B. Post-office, Zeeland." The letter had arrived by that morning's post; but, being Sunday evening, the grocer requested that application might be made for it the next morning. The stranger said the letter contained news, which it was of importance to him to receive without delay. Upon this, the grocer made an exception to customary rules, and gave him the letter. He read it by the light of the lamp in the passage. It must have been short, for the reading was done in a moment. He seemed to think over it for awhile; and then he turned round to go out. There

was nothing to notice in his look or in his manner. The witness offered a remark on the weather; and the gentleman said, “Yes, it looks like a bad night”—and so went away.

The post-master’s evidence was of importance in one respect: it suggested the motive which had brought the deceased to Zeeland. The letter addressed to “J. B.” was, in all probability, the letter seen by Mrs. Rook among the contents of the pocket-book, spread out on the table.

The inquiry being, so far, at an end, the inquest was adjourned—on the chance of obtaining additional evidence, when the reported proceedings were read by the public.

\* \* \* \* \*

Consulting a later number of the newspaper, Emily discovered that the deceased



person had been identified by a witness from London.

Henry Forth, gentleman's valet, being examined, made the following statement:

He had read the medical evidence contained in the report of the inquest; and, believing that he could identify the deceased, had been sent by his present master to assist the object of the inquiry. Ten days since, being then out of place, he had answered an advertisement. The next day, he was instructed to call at Tracey's Hotel, London, at six o'clock in the evening, and to ask for Mr. James Brown. Arriving at the hotel, he saw the gentleman for a few minutes only. Mr. Brown had a friend with him. After glancing over the valet's references, he said, "I haven't time enough to speak to you this evening. Call here to-morrow morning at nine o'clock." The gentleman who was present laughed, and

said, "You won't be up!" Mr. Brown answered, "That won't matter; the man can come to my bedroom, and let me see how he understands his duties, on trial." At nine the next morning, Mr. Brown was reported to be still in bed; and the witness was informed of the number of the room. He knocked at the door. A drowsy voice inside said something, which he interpreted as meaning "Come in." He went in. The toilet-table was on his left hand, and the bed (with the lower curtain drawn) was on his right. He saw on the table a tumbler with a little water in it, and with two false teeth in the water. Mr. Brown started up in the bed—looked at him furiously—abused him for daring to enter the room—and shouted to him to "get out." The witness, not accustomed to be treated in that way, felt naturally indignant, and at once withdrew—but not

before he had plainly seen the vacant place which the false teeth had been made to fill. Perhaps Mr. Brown had forgotten that he had left his teeth on the table. Or perhaps he (the valet) had misunderstood what had been said to him when he knocked at the door. Either way, it seemed to be plain enough that the gentleman resented the discovery of his false teeth by a stranger.

Having concluded his statement, the witness proceeded to identify the remains of the deceased.

He at once recognised the gentleman, named James Brown, whom he had twice seen—once in the evening, and again the next morning—at Tracey's Hotel. In answer to further inquiries, he declared that he knew nothing of the family, or of the place of residence, of the deceased. He complained to the proprietor of the hotel of the rude treat-

ment that he had received, and asked if Mr. Tracey knew anything of Mr. James Brown. Mr. Tracey knew nothing of him. On consulting the hotel book it was found that he had given notice to leave, that afternoon.

Before returning to London, the witness produced references which gave him an excellent character. He also left the address of the master who had engaged him three days since.

The last precaution adopted was to have the face of the corpse photographed, before the coffin was closed. On the same day the jury agreed on their verdict: "Wilful Murder against some person unknown."

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days later, Emily found a last allusion to the crime—extracted from the columns of the "South Hampshire Gazette."

A relative of the deceased, seeing the

report of the adjourned inquest, had appeared (accompanied by a medical gentleman); had seen the photograph; and had declared the identification by Henry Forth to be correct.

Among other particulars, now communicated for the first time, it was stated that the late Mr. James Brown had been unreasonably sensitive on the subject of his false teeth, and that the one member of his family who knew of his wearing them was the relative who now claimed his remains.

The claim having been established to the satisfaction of the authorities, the corpse was removed by railroad the same day. No further light had been thrown on the murder. The Handbill offering the reward, and describing the suspected man, had failed to prove of any assistance to the investigations of the police.

From that date, no further notice of the

crime committed at the Hand-in-Hand inn appeared in the public journals.

\* \* \* \* \*

Emily closed the volume which she had been consulting, and thankfully acknowledged the services of the librarian.

The new reader had excited this gentleman's interest. Noticing how carefully she examined the numbers of the old newspaper, he looked at her, from time to time, wondering whether it was good news or bad of which she was in search. She read steadily and continuously; but she never rewarded his curiosity by any outward sign of the impression that had been produced on her. When she left the room there was nothing to remark in her manner; she looked quietly thoughtful—and that was all.

The librarian smiled—amused by his own folly. Because a stranger's appearance had

attracted him, he had taken it for granted that circumstances of romantic interest must be connected with her visit to the library. Far from misleading him, as he supposed, his fancy might have been employed to better purpose, if it had taken a higher flight still—and had associated Emily with the fateful gloom of tragedy, in place of the brighter interest of romance.

There, among the ordinary readers of the day, was a dutiful and affectionate daughter following the dreadful story of the death of her father by murder, and believing it to be the story of a stranger—because she loved and trusted the person whose short-sighted mercy had deceived her. That very discovery, the dread of which had shaken the good doctor's firm nerves, had forced Alban to exclude from his confidence the woman whom he loved, and had driven the faithful old servant from the bedside of her

dying mistress—that very discovery Emily had now made, with a face which never changed colour, and a heart which beat at ease. Was the deception that had won this cruel victory over truth destined still to triumph, in the days which were to come? Yes—if the life of earth is a foretaste of the life of hell. No—if a lie *is* a lie, be the merciful motive for the falsehood what it may. No—if all deceit contains in it the seed of retribution, to be ripened inexorably in the lapse of time.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## MOTHER EVE.

THE servant received Emily, on her return from the library, with a sly smile. "Here he is again, Miss ; waiting to see you."

She opened the parlour door, and revealed Alban Morris, as restless as ever, walking up and down the room.

"When I missed you at the Museum, I was afraid you might be ill," he said. "Ought I to have gone away, when my anxiety was relieved ? Shall I go away now ?"

"You must take a chair, Mr. Morris, and hear what I have to say for myself. When you left me after your last visit, I suppose I felt the force of example. At any rate I,

like you, had my suspicions. I have been trying to confirm them — and I have failed."

He paused, with the chair in his hand. "Suspicions of Me?" he asked.

"Certainly! Can you guess how I have been employed for the last two days? No—not even your ingenuity can do that. I have been hard at work, in another reading-room, consulting the same back numbers of the same newspaper, which you have been examining at the British Museum. There is my confession—and now we will have some tea."

She moved to the fireplace, to ring the bell, and failed to see the effect produced on Alban by those lightly-uttered words. The common phrase is the only phrase that can describe it. He was thunderstruck.

"Yes," she resumed, "I have read the report of the inquest. If I know nothing

else, I know that the murder at Zeeland can't be the discovery which you are bent on keeping from me. Don't be alarmed for the preservation of your secret! I am too much discouraged to try again."

The servant interrupted them by answering the bell: Alban once more escaped detection. Emily gave her orders with an approach to the old gaiety of her school days. "Tea, as soon as possible—and let us have the new cake. Are you too much of a man, Mr. Morris, to like cake?"

In his state of agitation, he was unreasonably irritated by that playful question. "There is one thing I like better than cake," he said; "and that one thing is a plain explanation."

His tone puzzled her. "Have I said anything to offend you?" she asked. "Surely you can make allowance for a girl's curiosity? Oh, you shall have your explanation—and,

what is more, you shall have it without reserve !”

She was as good as her word. What she had thought, and what she had planned, when he left her after his last visit, was frankly and fully told. “If you wonder how I discovered the library,” she went on, “I must refer you to my aunt’s lawyer. He lives in the City—and I wrote to him to help me. I don’t consider that my time has been wasted. Mr. Morris, we owe an apology to Mrs. Rook.”

Alban’s astonishment, when he heard this, forced its way to expression in words. “What can you possibly mean ?” he asked.

The tea was brought in before Emily could reply. She filled the cups, and sighed as she looked at the cake. “If Cecilia was here, how she would enjoy it !” With that complimentary tribute to her friend, she handed a slice to Alban. He never even noticed it.

“We have both of us behaved most unkindly to Mrs. Rook,” she resumed. “I can excuse your not seeing it; for I should not have seen it either, but for the newspaper. While I was reading, I had an opportunity of thinking over what we said and did, when the poor woman’s behaviour so needlessly offended us. I was too excited to think, at the time—and, besides, I had been upset, only the night before, by what Miss Jethro said to me.”

Alban started. “What has Miss Jethro to do with it?” he asked.

“Nothing at all,” Emily answered. She spoke to me of her own private affairs. A long story—and you wouldn’t be interested in it. Let me finish what I had to say. Mrs. Rook was naturally reminded of the murder, when she heard that my name was Brown; and she must certainly have been struck—as I was—by the coincidence of my father’s death taking place at the same time when his un-

fortunate namesake was killed. Doesn't this sufficiently account for her agitation when she looked at the locket? We first took her by surprise; and then we suspected her of Heaven knows what, because the poor creature didn't happen to have her wits about her, and to remember at the right moment what a very common name 'James Brown' is. Don't you see it as I do?"

"I see that you have arrived at a remarkable change of opinion, since we spoke of the subject in the garden at school."

"In my place, you would have changed your opinion too. I shall write to Mrs. Rook by to-morrow's post."

Alban heard her with dismay. "Pray be guided by my advice!" he said earnestly. "Pray don't write that letter!"

"Why not?"

It was too late to recall the words

which he had rashly allowed to escape him. How could he reply?

To own that he had not only read what Emily had read, but had carefully copied the whole narrative and considered it at his leisure, appeared to be simply impossible after what he had now heard. Her peace of mind depended absolutely on his discretion. In this serious emergency, silence was a mercy, and silence was a lie. If he remained silent, might the mercy be trusted to atone for the lie? He was too fond of Emily to decide that question fairly, on its own merits. In other words, he shrank from the terrible responsibility of telling her the truth.

“Isn’t the imprudence of writing to such a person as Mrs. Rook plain enough to speak for itself?” he suggested cautiously.

“Not to me.”

She made that reply rather obstinately.

Alban seemed (in her view) to be trying to prevent her from atoning for an act of injustice. Besides, he despised her cake. "I want to know why you object," she said; taking back the neglected slice, and eating it herself.

"I object," Alban answered, "because Mrs. Rook is a coarse presuming woman. She may pervert your letter to some use of her own, which you may have reason to regret."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"It may be enough for *you*. When I have done a person an injury, and wish to make an apology, I don't think it necessary to inquire whether the person's manners happen to be vulgar or not."

Alban's patience was still equal to any demands that she could make on it. "I can only offer you advice which is honestly



intended for your own good," he gently replied.

"You would have more influence over me, Mr. Morris, if you were a little readier to take me into your confidence. I dare say I am wrong—but I don't like following advice which is given to me in the dark."

It was impossible to offend him. "Very naturally," he said; "I don't blame you."

Her colour deepened, and her voice rose. Alban's patient adherence to his own view—so courteously and considerately urged—was beginning to try her temper. "In plain words," she rejoined, "I am to believe that you can't be mistaken in your judgment of another person."

There was a ring at the door of the cottage while she was speaking. But she was too warmly interested in confuting Alban to notice it.

He was quite willing to be confuted.

Even when she lost her temper, she was still interesting to him. "I don't expect you to think me infallible," he said. "Perhaps you will remember that I have had some experience. I am unfortunately older than you are."

"Oh, if wisdom comes with age," she smartly reminded him, "your friend Miss Redwood is old enough to be your mother—and she suspected Mrs. Rook of murder, because the poor woman looked at a door, and disliked being in the next room to a fidgety old maid."

Alban's manner changed: he shrank from that chance allusion to doubts and fears which he dare not acknowledge. "Let us talk of something else," he said.

She looked at him with a saucy smile. "Have I driven you into a corner at last? And is *that* your way of getting out of it?"

Even his endurance failed. "Are you trying to provoke me?" he asked. "Are you no better than other women? I wouldn't have believed it of you, Emily?"

"Emily?" she repeated the name in a tone of surprise, which reminded him that he had addressed her with familiarity at a most inappropriate time—the time when they were on the point of a quarrel. He felt the implied reproach too keenly to be able to answer her with composure.

"I think of Emily—I love Emily—my one hope is that Emily may love me. Oh, my dear, is there no excuse if I forget to call you 'Miss' when you distress me?"

All that was tender and true in her nature secretly took his part. She would have followed that better impulse, if he had only been calm enough to understand her momentary silence, and to give her

time. But the temper of a gentle and generous man, once roused, is slow to subside. Alban abruptly left his chair. "I had better go!" he said.

"As you please," she answered. "Whether you go, Mr. Morris, or whether you stay, I shall write to Mrs. Rook."

The ring at the bell was followed by the appearance of a visitor. Doctor Allday opened the door, just in time to hear Emily's last words. Her vehemence seemed to amuse him.

"Who is Mrs. Rook," he asked.

"A most respectable person," Emily answered indignantly; "housekeeper to Sir Jervis Redwood. You needn't sneer at her, Doctor Allday! She has not always been in service—she was landlady of the inn at Zeeland."

The doctor, about to put his hat on a chair, paused. The inn at Zeeland re-

mind him of the Handbill, and of the visit of Miss Jethro.

“Why are you so hot over it?” he inquired.

“Because I detest prejudice!” With this assertion of liberal feeling she pointed to Alban, standing quietly apart at the further end of the room. “There is the most prejudiced man living—he hates Mrs. Rook. Would you like to be introduced to him? You’re a philosopher; you may do him some good. Doctor Allday—Mr. Alban Morris.”

The doctor recognised the man, with the felt hat and the objectionable beard, whose personal appearance had not impressed him favourably.

Although they may hesitate to acknowledge it, there are respectable Englishmen still left, who regard a felt hat and a beard as symbols of republican disaffection to the altar and the throne. Doctor Allday’s

manner might have expressed this curious form of patriotic feeling, but for the associations which Emily had revived. In his present frame of mind, he was outwardly courteous, because he was inwardly suspicious. Mrs. Rook had been described to him as formerly landlady of the inn at Zeeland. Were there reasons for Mr. Morris's hostile feeling towards this woman, which might be referable to the crime committed in her house, and which might threaten Emily's tranquillity, if they were made known? It would not be amiss to see a little more of Mr. Morris, on the first convenient occasion.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir."

"You are very kind, Doctor Allday."

The exchange of polite conventionalities having been accomplished, Alban approached Emily to take his leave, with mingled feel-

ings of regret and anxiety — regret for having allowed himself to speak harshly ; anxiety to part with her in kindness.

“Will you forgive me for differing from you?” It was all he could venture to say, in the presence of a stranger.

“Oh, yes!” she said quietly.

“Will you think again, before you decide?”

“Certainly, Mr. Morris. But it won’t alter my opinion, if I do.”

The doctor, hearing what passed between them, frowned. On what subject had they been differing? And what opinion did Emily decline to alter?

Alban gave it up. He took her hand gently. “Shall I see you at the Museum to-morrow?” he asked.

She was politely indifferent to the last. “Yes—unless something happens to keep me at home.”

The doctor's eyebrows still expressed disapproval. For what object was the meeting proposed? And why at a museum?

"Good afternoon, Doctor Allday."

"Good afternoon, sir."

For a moment after Alban's departure, the doctor stood irresolute. Arriving suddenly at a decision, he snatched up his hat, and turned to Emily in a hurry.

"I bring you news, my dear, which will surprise you. Who do you think has just left my house? Mrs. Ellmother! Don't interrupt me. She has made up her mind to go out to service again. Tired of leading an idle life—that's her own account of it—and asks me to act as her reference."

"Did you consent?"

"Consent! If I act as her reference, I shall be asked how she came to leave her last place. A nice dilemma! Either I must own that she deserted her mistress on her



deathbed—or tell a lie. When I put it to her in that way, she walked out of the house in dead silence. If she applies to you next, receive her as I did—or decline to see her, which would be better still.”

“Why am I to decline to see her?”

“In consequence of her behaviour to your aunt to be sure! No: I have said all I wanted to say—and I have no time to spare for answering idle questions. Good-bye.”

Socially-speaking, doctors try the patience of their nearest and dearest friends, in this respect—they are almost always in a hurry. Doctor Allday’s precipitate departure did not tend to sooth Emily’s irritated nerves. She began to find excuses for Mrs. Ellmother in a spirit of pure contradiction. The old servant’s behaviour might admit of justification: a friendly welcome might persuade her to explain herself. “If she applies to me,”

Emily determined, “I shall certainly receive her.”

Having arrived at this resolution, her mind reverted to Alban.

Some of the sharp things she had said to him, subjected to after-reflection in solitude, failed to justify themselves. Her better sense began to reproach her. She tried to silence that unwelcome monitor by laying the blame on Alban. Why had he been so patient and so good? What harm was there in his calling her “Emily?” If he had told her to call *him* by his Christian name, she might have done it. How noble he looked, when he got up to go away; he was actually handsome! Women may say what they please and write what they please: their natural instinct is to find their master in a man—especially when they like him. Sinking lower and lower in her own estimation, Emily tried to turn the current of her thoughts in another direction.

She took up a book—opened it, looked into it, threw it across the room.

If Alban had returned at that moment, resolved on a reconciliation—if he had said, “My dear, I want to see you like yourself again; will you give me a kiss, and make it up”—would he have left her crying, when he went away? She was crying now.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## MENTOR AND TELEMACHUS.

IF Emily's eyes could have followed Alban as her thoughts were following him, she would have seen him stop before he reached the end of the road in which the cottage stood. His heart was full of tenderness and sorrow: the longing to return to her was more than he could resist. It would be easy to wait, within view of the gate, until the doctor's visit came to an end. He had just decided to go back and keep watch—when he heard rapid footsteps approaching. There (devil take him!) was the doctor himself.

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Morris. Which way are you walking?"

“Any way,” Alban answered—not very graciously.

“Then let us take the turning that leads to my house. It’s not customary for strangers, especially when they happen to be Englishmen, to place confidence in each other. Let me set the example of violating that rule. I want to speak to you about Miss Emily. May I take your arm? Thank you. At my age, girls in general—unless they are my patients—are not objects of interest to me. But that girl at the cottage—I daresay I am in my dotage—I tell you, sir, she has bewitched me! Upon my soul, I could hardly be more anxious about her, if I was her father. And, mind, I am not an affectionate man by nature. Are you anxious about her too?”

“Yes.”

“In what way?”

“In what way are you anxious, Doctor Allday?”

The Doctor smiled grimly.

"You don't trust me? Well, I have promised to set the example. Keep your mask on, sir—mine is off, come what may of it. But, observe: if you repeat what I am going to say—"

Alban would hear no more. "Whatever you may say, Doctor Allday, is trusted to my honour. If you doubt my honour, be so good as to let go of my arm—I am not walking your way."

The doctor's hand tightened its grasp. "That little flourish of temper, my dear sir, is all I want to set me at my ease. I feel I have got hold of the right man. Now answer me this. Have you ever heard of a person named Miss Jethro?"

Alban suddenly came to a standstill.

"All right!" said the doctor. "I couldn't have wished for a more satisfactory reply."

"Wait a minute," Alban interposed.

“I know Miss Jethro as a teacher at Miss Ladd’s school, who left her situation suddenly—and I know no more.”

The doctor’s peculiar smile made its appearance again.

“Speaking in the vulgar tongue,” he said, “you seem to be in a hurry to wash your hands of Miss Jethro.”

“I have no reason to feel any interest in her,” Alban replied.

“Don’t be too sure of that, my friend. I have something to tell you which may alter your opinion. That ex-teacher at the school, sir, knows how the late Mr. Brown met his death, and how his daughter has been deceived about it.”

Alban listened with surprise—and with some little doubt, which he thought it wise not to acknowledge.

“The report of the inquest alludes to a ‘relative’ who claimed the body,” he said.

“Was that ‘relative’ the person who deceived Miss Emily? And was the person her aunt?”

“I must leave you to take your own view,” Doctor Allday replied. “A promise binds me not to repeat the information that I have received. Setting that aside we have the same object in view—and we must take care not to get in each other’s way. Here is my house. Let us go in, and make a clean breast of it on both sides.”

Established in the safe seclusion of his study, the doctor set the example of confession in these plain terms:

“We only differ in opinion on one point,” he said. “We both think it likely (from our experience of the women) that the suspected murderer had an accomplice. I say the guilty person is Miss Jethro. You say—Mrs. Rook.”

“When you have read my copy of the



report," Alban answered, "I think you will arrive at my conclusion. Mrs. Rook might have entered the out-house in which the two men slept, at any time during the night, while her husband was asleep. The jury believed her when she declared that she never woke till the morning. I don't."

"I am open to conviction, Mr. Morris. Now about the future. Do you mean to go on with your inquiries?"

"Even if I had no other motive than mere curiosity," Alban answered, "I think I should go on. But I have a more urgent purpose in view. All that I have done thus far, has been done in Emily's interests. My object, from the first, has been to preserve her from any association—in the past or in the future—with the woman whom I believe to have been concerned in her father's death. As I have already

told you, she is innocently doing all she can, poor thing, to put obstacles in my way.”

“Yes, yes,” said the doctor; “she means to write to Mrs. Rook—and you have nearly quarrelled about it. Trust me to take that matter in hand. I don’t regard it as serious. But I am mortally afraid of what you are doing in Emily’s interests. I wish you would give it up.”

“Why?”

“Because I see a danger. I don’t deny that Emily is as innocent of suspicion as ever. But the chances, next time, may be against us. How do you know to what lengths your curiosity may lead you? Or on what shocking discoveries you may not blunder, with the best intentions? Some unforeseen accident may open her eyes to the truth, before you can prevent it. I seem to surprise you? ’

“You do, indeed, surprise me.”

“In the old story, my dear sir, Mentor sometimes surprised Telemachus. I am Mentor—without being, I hope, quite so long-winded as that respectable philosopher. Let me put it in two words. Emily’s happiness is precious to you. Take care you are not made the means of wrecking it! Will you consent to a sacrifice, for her sake?”

“I will do anything for her sake.”

“Will you give up your inquiries?”

“From this moment I have done with them!”

“Mr. Morris, you are the best friend she has.”

“The next best friend to you, Doctor.”

In that fond persuasion they now parted—too eagerly devoted to Emily to look at the prospect before them in its least hopeful aspect. Both clever men, neither

one nor the other asked himself if any human resistance has ever yet obstructed the progress of truth—when truth has once begun to force its way to the light.

For the second time Alban stopped, on his way home. The longing to be reconciled with Emily was not to be resisted. He returned to the cottage, only to find disappointment waiting for him. The servant reported that her young mistress had gone to bed with a bad headache.

Alban waited a day, in the hope that Emily might write to him. No letter arrived. He repeated his visit the next morning. Fortune was still against him. On this occasion, Emily was engaged.

"Engaged with a visitor?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A young lady named Miss de Sor."

Where had he heard that name before? He remembered immediately that he had

heard it at the school. Miss de Sor was the unattractive new pupil, whom the girls called Francine. Alban looked at the parlour window as he left the cottage. It was of serious importance that he should set himself right with Emily. "And mere gossip," he thought contemptuously, "stands in my way!"

If he had been less absorbed in his own interests, he might have remembered that mere gossip is not always to be despised. It has worked fatal mischief in its time.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## FRANCINE.

"YOU'RE surprised to see me, of course?" Saluting Emily in those terms, Francine looked round the parlour with an air of satirical curiosity. "Dear me, what a little place to live in!"

"What brings you to London?" Emily enquired.

"You ought to know, my dear, without asking. Why did I try to make friends with you at school? And why have I been trying ever since? Because I hate you—I mean because I can't resist you—no! I mean because I hate myself for liking you. Oh, never mind my reasons. I insisted on going to London with Miss Ladd—when

that horrid woman announced that she had an appointment with her lawyer. I said, 'I want to see Emily.' 'Emily doesn't like you.' 'I don't care whether she likes me or not; I want to see her.' That's the way we snap at each other; and that's how I always carry my point. Here I am, till my duenna finishes her business and fetches me. What a prospect for You! Have you got any cold meat in the house? I'm not a glutton, like Cecilia—but I'm afraid I shall want some lunch."

"Don't talk in that way, Francine!"

"Do you mean to say you're glad to see me?"

"If you were only a little less hard and bitter, I should always be glad to see you."

"You darling! (excuse my impetuosity). What are you looking at? My new dress? Do you envy me?"

"No ; I admire the colour—that's all."

Francine rose, and shook out her dress, and showed it from every point of view.

"See how it's made : Paris of course ! Money, my dear ; money will do anything—except making one learn one's lessons."

"Are you not getting on any better, Francine ?"

"Worse, my sweet friend—worse. One of the masters, I am happy to say, has flatly refused to teach me any longer. 'Pupils without brains I am accustomed to,' he said in his broken English ; 'but a pupil with no heart is beyond my endurance.' Ha ! ha ! the mouldy old refugee has an eye for character, though. No heart—there I am, described in two words."

"And proud of it," Emily remarked.

"Yes—proud of it. Stop ! let me do myself justice. You consider tears a sign that one has some heart, don't you ? I was



very near crying last Sunday. A popular preacher did it; no less a person than Mr. Mirabel—you look as if you had heard of him.”

“I have heard of him from Cecilia.”

“Is *she* at Brighton? Then there’s one fool more in a fashionable watering place. Oh, she’s in Switzerland, is she? I don’t care where she is; I only care about Mr. Mirabel. We all heard he was at Brighton for his health, and was going to preach. Didn’t we cram the church! As to describing him, I give it up. He is the only little man I ever admired—hair as long as mine, and the sort of beard you see in pictures. I wish I had his fair complexion and his white hands. We were all in love with him—or with his voice, which was it?—when he began to read the commandments. I wish I could imitate him when he came to the fifth commandment. He began in

his deepest bass voice: "Honour thy father—" He stopped, and looked up to heaven as if he saw the rest of it there. He went on with a tremendous emphasis on the next word. '*And* thy mother,' he said (as if that was quite a different thing) in a tearful fluty quivering voice which was a compliment to mothers in itself. We all felt it, mothers or not. But the great sensation was when he got into the pulpit. The manner in which he dropped on his knees, and hid his face in his hands, and showed his beautiful rings was, as a young lady said behind me, simply seraphic. We understood his celebrity, from that moment—I wonder whether I can remember the sermon."

"You needn't attempt it on my account," Emily said.

"My dear, don't be obstinate. Wait till you hear him."

“I am quite content to wait.”

“Ah, you’re just in the right state of mind to be converted; you’re in a fair way to become one of his greatest admirers. They say he is so agreeable in private life; I am dying to know him.—Do I hear a ring at the bell? Is somebody else coming to see you?”

The servant brought in a card and a message. “The person will call again, Miss.”

Emily looked at the name written on the card. “Mrs. Ellmother!” she exclaimed.

“What an extraordinary name!” cried Francine. “Who is she?”

“My aunt’s old servant.”

“Does she want a situation?”

Emily looked at some lines of writing at the back of the card. Doctor Allday had rightly foreseen events. Rejected by the doctor, Mrs. Ellmother had no alternative but to ask Emily to help her.

"If she is out of place," Francine went on, "she may be just the sort of person I am looking for."

"You?" Emily asked, in astonishment.

Francine refused to explain until she got an answer to her question. "Tell me first," she said, "is Mrs. Ellmother engaged?"

"No; she wants an engagement, and she asks me to be her reference."

"Is she sober, honest, middle-aged, clean, steady, good-tempered, industrious?" Francine rattled on. "Has she all the virtues, and none of the vices? Is she not too good-looking, and has she no male followers? In one terrible word—will she satisfy Miss Ladd?"

"What has Miss Ladd to do with it?"

"How stupid you are, Emily! Do put the woman's card down on the table, and listen to me. Haven't I told you that one of my masters has declined to have anything more

to do with me? Doesn't that help you to understand how I get on with the rest of them? I am no longer Miss Ladd's pupil, my dear. Thanks to my laziness and my temper, I am to be raised to the dignity of 'a parlour boarder.' In other words, I am to be a young lady who patronises the school; with a room of my own, and a servant of my own. All provided for by a private arrangement between my father and Miss Ladd, before I left the West Indies. My mother was at the bottom of it, I have not the least doubt. You don't appear to understand me."

"I don't indeed!"

Francine considered a little. "Perhaps they were fond of you, at home," she suggested.

"Say they loved me, Francine -- and I loved them."

"Ah, my position is just the reverse of

yours. Now they have got rid of me, they don't want me back again at home. I know as well what my mother said to my father, as if I had heard her. 'Francine will never get on at school, at her age. Try her, by all means; but make some other arrangement with Miss Ladd in case of a failure—or she will be returned on our hands like a bad shilling.' There is my mother, my anxious affectionate mother, hit off to a T!"

"She *is* your mother, Francine; don't forget that."

"Oh, no; I won't forget it. My cat is my kitten's mother—there! there! I won't shock your sensibilities. Let us get back to matter of fact. When I begin my new life, Miss Ladd makes one condition. My maid is to be a model of discretion—an elderly woman, not a skittish young person who will only encourage me. I must submit to the elderly woman, or I shall be sent back to the West

Indies after all. How long did Mrs. Ellmother live with your aunt ? ”

“ Twenty-five years, and more.”

“ Good heavens, it’s a life-time ! Why isn’t this amazing creature living with you, now your aunt is dead ? Did you send her away ? ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ Then why did she go ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Do you mean that she went away without a word of explanation ? ”

“ Yes ; that is exactly what I mean.”

“ When did she go ? As soon as your aunt was dead ? ”

“ That doesn’t matter, Francine.”

“ In plain English, you won’t tell me ? I am all on fire with curiosity—and that’s how you put me out ! My dear, if you have the slightest regard for me, let us have the woman in here when she comes back for her

answer. Somebody must satisfy me. I mean to make Mrs. Ellmother explain herself."

"I don't think you will succeed, Francine."

"Wait a little, and you will see. By-the-bye, it is understood that my new position at the school gives me the privilege of accepting invitations. Do you know any nice people to whom you can introduce me?"

"I am the last person in the world who has a chance of helping you," Emily answered. "Excepting good Doctor Allay—" On the point of adding the name of Alban Morris, she checked herself without knowing why, and substituted the name of her school-friend. "And, not forgetting Cecilia," she resumed, "I know nobody."

"Cecilia's a fool," Francine remarked gravely; "but now I think of it, she may be worth cultivating. Her father is a member of parliament—and didn't I hear



that he has a fine place in the country? You see, Emily, I may expect to be married (with my money), if I can only get into good society. (Don't suppose I am dependent on my father; my marriage portion is provided for in my uncle's will.) Cecilia may really be of some use to me. Why shouldn't I make a friend of her, and get introduced to her father—in the autumn, you know, when the house is full of company? Have you any idea when she is coming back?"

"No."

"Do you think of writing to her?"

"Of course!"

"Give her my kind love; and say I hope she enjoys Switzerland."

"Francine, you are positively shameless! After calling my dearest friend a fool and a glutton, you send her your love for your own selfish ends; and you expect me to

help you in deceiving her ! I won't do it."

"Keep your temper, my child. We are all selfish, you little goose. The only difference is—some of us own it, and some of us don't. I shall find my own way to Cecilia's good graces quite easily : the way is through her mouth. You mentioned a certain Doctor Allday. Does he give parties ? And do the right sort of men go to them ? Hush ! I think I hear the bell again. Go to the door, and see who it is."

Emily waited, without taking any notice of this suggestion. The servant announced that "the person had called again, to know if there was any answer."

"Show her in here," Emily said.

The servant withdrew, and came back again.

"The person doesn't wish to intrude, Miss ; it will be quite sufficient if you will send a message by me."

Emily crossed the room to the door.

“Come in, Mrs. Ellmother,” she said.

“You have been too long away already.

Pray come in.”

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"BONY."

MRS. ELLMOTHER reluctantly entered the room.

Since Emily had seen her last, her personal appearance doubly justified the nickname by which her late mistress had distinguished her. The old servant was worn and wasted; her gown hung loose on her angular body; the big bones of her face stood out, more prominently than ever. She took Emily's offered hand doubtingly. "I hope I see you well, Miss," she said—with hardly a vestige left of her former firmness of voice and manner.

"I am afraid you have been suffering from illness," Emily answered gently.

"It's the life I'm leading that wears me down; I want work and change."

Making that reply, she looked round, and discovered Francine observing her with undisguised curiosity. "You have got company with you," she said to Emily; "I had better go away, and come back another time."

Francine stopped her before she could open the door. "You mustn't go away; I wish to speak to you."

"About what, Miss?"

The eyes of the two women met—one, near the end of her life, concealing under a rugged surface a nature sensitively affectionate and incorruptibly true: the other, young in years, without the virtues of youth, hard in manner and hard at heart. In silence on either side, they stood face to face; strangers brought together by the force of circumstances, working inexorably towards their hidden end.

Emily introduced Mrs. Ellmother to Francine. "It may be worth your while," she hinted, "to hear what this young lady has to say."

Mrs. Ellmother listened, with little appearance of interest in anything that a stranger might have to say: her eyes rested on the card which contained her written request to Emily. Francine, watching her closely, understood what was passing in her mind. It might be worth while to conciliate the old woman by a little act of attention. Turning to Emily, Francine pointed to the card lying on the table. "You have not attended yet to Mrs. Ellmother's request," she said.

Emily at once assured Mrs. Ellmother that the request was granted. "But is it wise," she asked, "to go out to service again, at your age?"

"I have been used to service all my life, Miss Emily--that's one reason. And

service may help me to get rid of my own thoughts—that’s another. If you can find me a situation somewhere, you will be doing me a good turn.”

“Is it useless to suggest that you might come back, and live with me?” Emily ventured to say.

Mrs. Ellmother’s head sank on her breast. “Thank you kindly, Miss; it is useless.”

“Why is it useless?” Francine asked.

Mrs. Ellmother was silent.

“Miss de Sor is speaking to you,” Emily reminded her.

“Am I to answer Miss de Sor?”

Attentively observing what passed, and placing her own construction on looks and tones, it suddenly struck Francine that Emily herself might be in Mrs. Ellmother’s confidence, and that she might have reasons of her own for assuming ignorance when awk-

ward questions were asked. For the moment at least, Francine decided on keeping her suspicions to herself.

"I may perhaps offer you the employment you want," she said to Mrs. Ellmother. "I am staying at Brighton, for the present, with the lady who was Miss Emily's schoolmistress, and I am in need of a maid. Would you be willing to consider it, if I proposed to engage you?"

"Yes, Miss."

"In that case, you can hardly object to the customary inquiry. Why did you leave your last place?"

Mrs. Ellmother appealed to Emily. "Did you tell this young lady how long I remained in my last place?"

Melancholy remembrances had been revived in Emily by the turn which the talk had now taken. Francine's cat-like



patience, stealthily feeling its way to its end, jarred on her nerves. "Yes," she said; "in justice to you, I have mentioned your long term of service."

Mrs. Ellmother addressed Francine. "You know, Miss, that I served my late mistress for over twenty-five years. Will you please remember that—and let it be a reason for not asking me why I left my place."

Francine smiled compassionately. "My good creature, you have mentioned the very reason why I *should* ask! You live five-and-twenty years with your mistress—and then suddenly leave her—and you expect me to pass over this extraordinary proceeding without inquiry. Take a little time to think."

"I want no time to think. What I had in my mind, when I left Miss Letitia, is something which I refuse to explain, Miss, to you, or to anybody."

She recovered some of her old firmness, when she made that reply. Francine saw the necessity of yielding—for the time at least. Emily remained silent, oppressed by remembrance of the doubts and fears which had darkened the last miserable days of her aunt's illness. She began already to regret having made Francine and Mrs. Ellinother known to each other.

"I won't dwell on what appears to be a painful subject," Francine graciously resumed. "I meant no offence. You are not angry, I hope?"

"Sorry, Miss. I might have been angry, at one time. That time is over."

It was said sadly and resignedly: Emily heard the answer. Her heart ached as she looked at the old servant, and thought of the contrast between past and present. With what a hearty welcome this broken woman had been used to

receive her in the bygone holiday-time! Her eyes moistened. She felt the merciless persistency of Francine, as if it had been an insult offered to herself. "Give it up!" she said sharply.

"Leave me, my dear, to manage my own business," Francine replied. "About your qualifications?" she continued, turning coolly to Mrs. Ellmother. "Can you dress hair?"

"Yes."

"I ought to tell you," Francine insisted, "that I am very particular about my hair."

"My mistress was very particular about her hair," Mrs. Ellmother answered.

"Are you a good needlewoman?"

"As good as ever I was—with the help of my spectacles."

Francine turned to Emily. "See how well we get on together! We are be-

ginning to understand each other already. I am an odd creature, Mrs. Ellmother. Sometimes, I take sudden likings to persons—I have taken a liking to you. Do you begin to think a little better of me than you did? I hope you will produce the right impression on Miss Ladd; you shall have every assistance that I can give. I will beg Miss Ladd, as a favour to me, not to ask you that one forbidden question."

Poor Mrs. Ellmother, puzzled by the sudden appearance of Francine in the character of an eccentric young lady, the creature of genial impulse, thought it right to express her gratitude for the promised interference in her favour. "That's kind of you, Miss," she said.

"No, no, only just! I ought to tell you there's one thing Miss Ladd is strict about—sweethearts. Are you quite sure,"

Francine inquired jocosely, "that you can answer for yourself, in that particular?"

This effort of humour produced its intended effect. Mrs. Ellmother, thrown off her guard, actually smiled. "Lord, Miss, what will you say next!"

"My good soul, I will say something next that is more to the purpose. If Miss Ladd asks me why you have so unaccountably refused to be a servant again in this house, I shall take care to say that it is certainly not out of dislike to Miss Emily."

"You need say nothing of the sort," Emily quietly remarked.

"And still less," Francine proceeded, without noticing the interruption—"still less through any disagreeable remembrances of Miss Emily's aunt."

Mrs. Ellmother saw the trap that had been set for her. "It won't do, Miss," she said.

"What won't do?"

"Trying to pump me."

Francine burst out laughing. Emily noticed an artificial ring in her gaiety which suggested that she was exasperated, rather than amused, by the repulse which had baffled her curiosity once more.

Mrs. Ellmother reminded the merry young lady that the proposed arrangement between them had not been concluded yet. "Am I to understand, Miss, that you will keep a place open for me in your service?"

"You are to understand," Francine replied sharply, "that I must have Miss Ladd's approval, before I can engage you. Suppose you come to Brighton? I will pay your fare of course."

"Never mind my fare, Miss. Will you give up pumping?"

"Make your mind easy. It's quite useless to attempt pumping *you*. When will you come?"

Mrs. Ellmother pleaded for a little delay. "I'm altering my gowns," she said. "I get thinner and thinner—don't I, Miss Emily? my work won't be done before Thursday."

"Let us say Friday, then," Francine proposed.

"Friday!" Mrs. Ellmother exclaimed. "You forget that Friday is an unlucky day."

"I forgot that, certainly! How can you be so absurdly superstitious?"

"You may call it what you like, Miss. I have good reason to think as I do. I was married on a Friday—and a bitter bad marriage it turned out to be. Superstitious, indeed! You don't know what my experience has been. My only sister was one of a party of thirteen at dinner; and she died within the year. If we are to get on together nicely, I'll take that journey on Saturday, if you please."

"Anything to satisfy you," Francine agreed; "there is the address. Come in the middle of the day, and we will give you your dinner. No fear of our being thirteen in number! What will you do, if you have the misfortune to spill the salt?"

"Take a pinch between my finger and thumb, and throw it over my left shoulder," Mrs. Ellmother answered gravely. "Good day, Miss."

"Good day."

Emily followed the departing visitor out to the hall. She had seen and heard enough to decide her on trying to break off the proposed negotiation—with the one kind purpose of protecting Mrs. Ellmother against the pitiless curiosity of Francine.

"Do you think you and that young lady are likely to get on well together?" she asked.



"I have told you already, Miss Emily, I want to get away from my own home and my own thoughts; I don't care where I go, so long as I do that." Having answered in those words, Mrs. Ellmother opened the door, and waited awhile, thinking. "I wonder whether the dead know what is going on in the world they have left?" she said, looking at Emily. "If they do, there's one among them knows my thoughts, and feels for me. Good-bye, Miss—and don't think worse of me than I deserve."

Emily went back to the parlour. The only resource left was to plead with Francine for mercy to Mrs. Ellmother.

"Do you really mean to give it up?" she asked.

"To give up—what? 'Pumping,' as that obstinate old creature calls it?"

Emily persisted. "Don't worry the poor old soul! However strangely she may have

left my aunt and me, her motives are kind and good—I am sure of that. Will you let her keep her harmless little secret?"

"Oh, of course!"

"I don't believe you, Francine!"

"Don't you? I am like Cecilia—I am getting hungry. Shall we have some lunch?"

"You hard-hearted creature!"

"Does that mean—no luncheon until I have owned the truth? Suppose *you* own the truth? I won't tell Mrs. Ellmother that you have betrayed her."

"For the last time, Francine—I know no more of it than you do. If you persist in taking your own view, you as good as tell me I lie; and you will oblige me to leave the room."

Even Francine's obstinacy was compelled to give way, so far as appearances went. Still possessed by the delusion that Emily was deceiving her, she was now animated

by a stronger motive than mere curiosity. Her sense of her own importance imperatively urged her to prove that she was not a person who could be deceived with impunity.

"I beg your pardon," she said with humility. "But I must positively have it out with Mrs. Ellmother. She has been more than a match for me—my turn next. I mean to get the better of her; and I shall succeed."

"I have already told you, Francine—you will fail."

"My dear, I am a dunce, and I don't deny it. But let me tell you one thing. I haven't lived all my life in the West Indies, among black servants, without learning something"

"What do you mean?"

"More, my clever friend, than you are likely to guess. In the meantime, don't forget the duties of hospitality. Ring the bell for luncheon."

## CHAPTER XXX.

## LADY DORIS.

THE arrival of Miss Ladd, some time before she had been expected, interrupted the two girls at a critical moment. She had hurried over her business in London, eager to pass the rest of the day with her favourite pupil. Emily's affectionate welcome was, in some degree at least, inspired by a sensation of relief. To feel herself in the embrace of the warm-hearted schoolmistress was like finding a refuge from Francine.

When the hour of departure arrived, Miss Ladd invited Emily to Brighton for the second time. "On the last occasion, my dear, you wrote me an excuse; I won't be

treated in that way again. If you can't return with us now, come to-morrow." She added in a whisper, "Otherwise, I shall think you include *me* in your dislike of Francine."

There was no resisting this. It was arranged that Emily should go to Brighton on the next day.

Left by herself her thoughts might have reverted to Mrs. Ellmother's doubtful prospects, and to Francine's strange allusion to her life in the West Indies, but for the arrival of two letters by the afternoon post. The handwriting on one of them was unknown to her. She opened that one first. It was an answer to the letter of apology which she had persisted in writing to Mrs. Rook. Happily for herself, Alban's influence had not been without its effect, after his departure. She had written kindly—but she had written briefly at the same time.

Mrs. Rook's reply presented a nicely compounded mixture of gratitude and grief. The gratitude was addressed to Emily, as a matter of course. The grief related to her "excellent master." Sir Jervis's strength had suddenly failed. His medical attendant, being summoned, had expressed no surprise. "My patient is over seventy years of age," the doctor remarked. "He will sit up late at night, writing his book ; and he refuses to take exercise, till headache and giddiness force him to try the fresh air. As the necessary result, he has broken down at last. It may end in paralysis, or it may end in death." Reporting this expression of medical opinion, Mrs. Rook's letter glided imperceptibly from respectful sympathy to modest regard for her own interests in the future. It might be the sad fate of her husband and herself to be thrown on the world again. If necessity brought them to London, would

“kind Miss Emily grant her the honour of an interview, and favour a poor unlucky woman with a word of advice?”

“She may pervert your letter to some use of her own, which you may have reason to regret.” Did Emily remember Alban’s warning words? No: she accepted Mrs. Rook’s reply as a gratifying tribute to the justice of her own opinions.

Having proposed to write to Alban, feeling penitently that she had been in the wrong, she was now readier than ever to send him a letter, feeling compassionately that she had been in the right. Besides, it was due to the faithful friend, who was still working for her in the reading-room, that he should be informed of Sir Jervis’s illness. Whether the old man lived or whether he died, his literary labours were fatally interrupted in either case; and one of the consequences would be the termination of her employment at the

Museum. Although the second of the two letters which she had received was addressed to her in Cecilia's handwriting, Emily waited to read it until she had first written to Alban. "He will come to-morrow," she thought; "and we shall both make apologies. I shall regret that I was angry with him, and he will regret that he was mistaken in his judgment of Mrs. Rook. We shall be as good friends again as ever."

In this happy frame of mind she opened Cecilia's letter. It was full of good news from first to last.

The invalid sister had made such rapid progress towards recovery that the travellers had arranged to set forth on their journey back to England in a fortnight. "My one regret," Cecilia added, "is the parting with Lady Doris. She and her husband are going to Genoa, where they will embark in Lord Janeaway's yacht for a cruise in the Medi-



terranean. When we have said that miserable word good-bye—oh, Emily, what a hurry I shall be in to get back to you! Those allusions to your lonely life are so dreadful my dear, that I have destroyed your letter; it is enough to break one's heart only to look at it. When once I get to London, there shall be no more solitude for my poor afflicted friend. Papa will be free from his parliamentary duties in August—and he has promised to have the house full of delightful people to meet you. Who do you think will be one of our guests? He is illustrious; he is fascinating; he deserves a line all to himself thus:

“The Reverend Miles Mirabel!

“Lady Doris has discovered that the country parsonage, in which this brilliant clergyman submits to exile, is only twelve miles away from our house. She has written to Mr. Mirabel to introduce me, and

to mention the date of my return. We will have some fun with the popular preacher—we will both fall in love with him together.

"Is there anybody to whom you would like me to send an invitation? Shall we have Mr. Alban Morris? Now I know how kindly he took care of you at the railway station, your good opinion of him is my opinion. Your letter also mentions a doctor. Is he nice? and do you think he will let me eat pastry, if we have him too? I am so overflowing with hospitality (all for your sake) that I am ready to invite anybody, and everybody, to cheer you and make you happy again. Would you like to meet Miss Lald and the whole school?

"As to our amusements, make your mind easy.

"I have come to a distinct understanding with Papa that we are to have dances every evening—except when we try a little concert

as a change. Private theatricals are to follow, when we want another change after the dancing and the music. No early rising; no fixed hour for breakfast; everything that is most exquisitely delicious at dinner—and, to crown all, your room next to mine, for delightful midnight gossipings, when we ought to be in bed. What do you say, darling, to the programme?

“A last piece of news—and I have done.

“I have actually had a proposal of marriage, from a young gentleman who sits opposite to me at the table d’hôte! When I tell you that he has white eyelashes, and red hands, and such enormous front teeth that he can’t shut his mouth, you will not need to be told that I refused him. This vindictive person has abused me ever since, in the most shameful manner. I heard him last night, under my window, trying to set one of his friends against me. ‘Keep

clear of her, my dear fellow; she's the most heartless creature living.' The friend took my part; he said, 'I don't agree with you; the young lady is a person of great sensibility.' 'Nonsense!' says my amiable lover; 'she eats too much—her sensibility is all stomach.' There's a wretch for you. What a shameful advantage to take of sitting opposite to me at dinner! Good-bye, my love, till we meet, soon, and are as happy together as the day is long."

Emily kissed the signature. At that moment of all others, Cecilia was such a refreshing contrast to Francine!

Before putting the letter away, she looked again at that part of it which mentioned Lady Doris's introduction of Cecilia to Mr. Mirabel. "I don't feel the slightest interest in Mr. Mirabel," she thought, smiling as the idea occurred to her; "and I need never have known him,

but for Lady Doris—who is a perfect stranger to me!”

She had just placed the letter in her desk, when a visitor was announced. Doctor Allday presented himself (in a hurry as usual).

“Another patient waiting?” Emily asked mischievously. “No time to spare, again?”

“Not a moment,” the old gentleman answered. “Have you heard from Mrs. Ellmother?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t mean to say you have answered her?”

“I have done better than that, doctor—I have seen her this morning.”

“And consented to be her reference, of course?”

“How well you know me!”

Doctor Allday was a philosopher: he kept his temper. “Just what I might have

expected," he said. "Eve and the apple! Only forbid a woman to do anything, and she does it directly—because you have forbidden her. I'll try the other way with you now, Miss Emily. There was something else that I meant to have forbidden."

"What was it?"

"May I make a special request?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, my dear, write to Mrs. Rook! I beg and entreat of you, write to Mrs. Rook!"

Emily's playful manner suddenly disappeared. Ignoring the doctor's little outbreak of humour, she waited in grave surprise, until it was his pleasure to explain himself.

Doctor Allday, on his side, ignored the ominous change in Emily: he went on as pleasantly as ever. "Mr. Morris and I have had a long talk about you, my

dear. Mr. Morris is a capital fellow; I recommend him as a sweetheart. I also back him in the matter of Mrs. Rook. —What's the matter now? You're as red as a rose. Temper again, eh?"

"Hatred of meanness!" Emily answered indignantly. "I despise a man who plots, behind my back, to get another man to help him. Oh, how I have been mistaken in Alban Morris!"

"Oh, how little you know of the best friend you have!" cried the doctor, imitating her. "Girls are all alike; the only man they can understand, is the man who flatters them. *Will* you oblige me by writing to Mrs. Rook?"

Emily made an attempt to match the doctor, with his own weapons. "Your little joke comes too late," she said satirically. "There is Mrs. Rook's answer. Read it, and —" she checked herself

even in her anger she was incapable of speaking ungenerously to the old man who had so warmly befriended her. "I wont say to *you*," she resumed, "what I might have said to another person."

"Shall I say it for you?" asked the incorrigible doctor. "'Read it, and be ashamed of yourself'—That was what you had in your mind, isn't it? Anything to please you, my dear." He put on his spectacles, read the letter, and handed it back to Emily with an impenetrable countenance. "What do you think of my new spectacles?" he asked, as he took the glasses off his nose. "In the experience of thirty years, I have had three grateful patients." He put the spectacles back in the case. "This comes from the third. Very gratifying—very gratifying."

"Emily's sense of humour was not the uppermost sense in her at that moment.



She pointed with a peremptory forefinger to Mrs. Rook's letter. "Have you nothing to say about this?"

The doctor had so little to say about it that he was able to express himself in one word:

"Humbug!"

He took his hat—nodded kindly to Emily—and hurried away to feverish pulses waiting to be felt, and to furred tongues that were ashamed to show themselves.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## MOIRA.

WHEN Alban presented himself the next morning, the hours of the night had exercised their tranquillising influence over Emily. She remembered sorrowfully how Doctor Allday had disturbed her belief in the man who loved her: no feeling of irritation remained. Alban noticed that her manner was unusually subdued; she received him with her customary grace, but not with her customary smile.

"Are you not well?" he asked.

"I am a little out of spirits," she replied.

"A disappointment—that is all."

He waited a moment, apparently in the

expectation that she might tell him what the disappointment was. She remained silent, and she looked away from him. Was he in any way answerable for the depression of spirits to which she alluded. The doubt occurred to him—but he said nothing.

“I suppose you have received my letter?” she resumed.

“I have come here to thank you for your letter.”

“It was my duty to tell you of Sir Jervis’s illness; I deserve no thanks.”

“You have written to me so kindly,” Alban reminded her; “you have referred to our difference of opinion, the last time I was here, so gently and so forgivingly——”

“If I had written a little later,” she interposed, “the tone of my letter might have been less agreeable to you. I

happened to send it to the post, before I received a visit from a friend of yours—a friend who had something to say to me after consulting with you."

"Do you mean Doctor Allday?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"What you wished him to say. He did his best; he was as obstinate and unfeeling as you could possibly wish him to be; but he was too late. I have written to Mrs. Rook, and I have received a reply." She spoke sadly, not angrily—and pointed to the letter lying on her desk.

Alban understood: he looked at her in despair. "Is that wretched woman doomed to set us at variance every time we meet!" he exclaimed.

Emily silently held out the letter.

He refused to take it. "The wrong you have done me is not to be set right in that

way," he said. "You believe the doctor's visit was arranged between us. I never knew that he intended to call on you; I had no interest in sending him here--and I must not interfere again between you and Mrs. Rook."

"I don't understand you."

"You will understand me, when I tell you how my conversation with Doctor All-day ended. I have done with interference; I have done with advice. Whatever my doubts may be, all further effort on my part to justify them—all further enquiries, no matter in what direction—are at an end: I make the sacrifice, for your sake. No! I must repeat what you said to me just now; I deserve no thanks. What I have done, has been done in deference to Doctor All-day—against my own convictions; in spite of my own fears. Ridiculous convictions! ridiculous fears! Men with

morbid minds are their own tormentors. It doesn't matter how I suffer, so long as you are at ease. I shall never thwart your or vex you again. Have you a better opinion of me now?"

She made the best of all answers—she gave him her hand.

"May I kiss it?" he asked, as timidly as if he had been a boy addressing his first sweetheart.

She was half inclined to laugh, and half inclined to cry. "Yes, if you like," she said softly.

"Will you let me come and see you again?"

"Gladly—when I return to London."

"You are going away?"

"I am going to Brighton this afternoon, to stay with Miss Ladd."

It was hard to lose her, on the happy day when they understood each other at

last. An expression of disappointment passed over his face. He rose, and walked restlessly to the window. "Miss Ladd?" he repeated, turning to Emily as if an idea had struck him. "Did I hear, at the school, that Miss de Sor was to spend the holidays under the care of Miss Ladd?"

"Yes."

"The same young lady," he went on, "who paid you a visit yesterday morning?"

"The same."

That haunting distrust of the future, which he had first betrayed and then affected to ridicule, exercised its depressing influence over his better sense. He was unreasonable enough to feel doubtful of Francine, simply because she was a stranger.

"Miss de Sor is a new friend of yours," he said. "Do you like her?"

It was not an easy question to answer—

without entering into particulars which Emily's delicacy of feeling warned her to avoid. "I must know a little more of Miss de Sor," she said, "before I can decide."

Alban's misgivings were naturally encouraged by this evasive reply. He began to regret having left the cottage, on the previous day, when he had heard that Emily was engaged. He might have sent in his card, and might have been admitted. It was an opportunity lost of observing Francine. On the morning of her first day at school, when they had accidentally met at the summer house, she had left a disagreeable impression on his mind. Ought he to allow his opinion to be influenced by this circumstance? or ought he to follow Emily's prudent example, and suspend judgment until he knew a little more of Francine?



“Is any day fixed for your return to London?” he asked.

“Not yet,” she said; “I hardly know how long my visit will be.”

“In little more than a fortnight,” he continued, “I shall return to my classes—they will be dreary classes, without you. Miss de Sor goes back to the school with Miss Ladd, I suppose?”

Emily was at a loss to account for the depression in his looks and tones, while he was making these unimportant inquiries. She tried to rouse him by speaking lightly in reply.

“Miss de Sor returns in quite a new character; she is to be a guest instead of a pupil. Do you wish to be better acquainted with her?”

“Yes,” he said gravely, “now I know that she is a friend of yours.” He returned to his place near her. “A pleasant visit

makes the days pass quickly," he resumed. "You may remain at Brighton longer than you anticipate; and we may not meet again for some time to come. If anything happens——"

"Do you mean anything serious?" she asked.

"No, no! I only mean—if I can be of any service. In that case, will you write to me?"

"You know I will!"

She looked at him anxiously. He had completely failed to hide from her the uneasy state of his mind: a man less capable of concealment of feeling never lived. "You are anxious, and out of spirits," she said gently. "Is it my fault?"

"Your fault? oh, don't think that! I have my dull days and my bright days—and just now my barometer is down at dull." His voice faltered, in spite of his efforts

to control it; he gave up the struggle, and took his hat to go. "Do you remember, Emily, what I once said to you in the garden at school? I still believe there is a time of fulfilment to come in our two lives." He suddenly checked himself, as if there had been something more in his mind to which he hesitated to give expression—and held out his hand to bid her good bye.

"My memory of what you said in the garden is better than yours," she reminded him. "You said, 'Happen what may in the interval, I trust the future.' Do you feel the same trust still?"

He sighed—drew her to him gently—and kissed her on the forehead. Was that his only reply? She was not calm enough to ask him the question: it remained in her thoughts for some time after he had gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the same day, Emily was at Brighton.

Francine happened to be alone in the drawing-room. Her first proceeding, when Emily was shown in, was to stop the servant.

"Have you taken my letter to the post?"

"Yes, Miss."

"It doesn't matter." She dismissed the servant by a gesture, and burst into such effusive hospitality that she actually insisted on kissing Emily. "Do you know what I have been doing?" she said. "I have been writing to Cecilia—directing to the care of her father, at the House of Commons. I stupidly forgot that you would be able to give me the right address in Switzerland. You don't object, I hope, to my making myself agreeable to our dear, beautiful, greedy girl? It is of such importance to me to surround myself with influential friends—and, of course, I have

given her your love. Don't look disgusted! Come, and see your room.—Oh, never mind Miss Ladd. You will see her when she wakes. Ill? Is that sort of old woman ever ill? She's only taking her nap after bathing. Bathing in the sea, at her age! How she must frighten the fishes!”

Having seen her own bedchamber, Emily was next introduced to the room occupied by Francine.

One object that she noticed in it caused her some little surprise—not unmingled with disgust. She discovered on the toilet-table a coarsely caricatured portrait of Mrs. Ellmother. It was a sketch in pencil—wretchedly drawn; but spitefully successful as a likeness. “I didn't know you were an artist,” Emily remarked, with an ironical emphasis on the last word. Francine laughed scornfully—crumpled the

drawing up in her hand—and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

“You satirical creature!” she burst out gaily. “If you had lived a dull life at San Domingo, you would have taken to spoiling paper too. I might really have turned out an artist, if I had been clever and industrious like you. As it was, I learnt a little drawing—and got tired of it. I tried modelling in wax—and got tired of it. Who do you think was my teacher? One of our slaves.”

“A slave!” Emily exclaimed.

“Yes—a mulatto, if you wish me to be particular; the daughter of an English father and a negro mother. In her young time (at least she said so herself) she was quite a beauty, in her particular style. Her master’s favourite; he educated her himself. Besides drawing and painting, and modelling in wax, she could

sing and play—all the accomplishments thrown away on a slave! When her owner died, my uncle bought her at the sale of the property.”

A word of natural compassion escaped Emily—to Francine’s surprise.

“Oh, my dear, you needn’t pity her! Sappho (that was her name) fetched a high price, even when she was no longer young. She came to us, by inheritance, with the estates and the rest of it; and took a fancy to me, when she found I didn’t get on well with my father and mother. ‘I owe it to *my* father and mother,’ she used to say, ‘that I am a slave. When I see affectionate daughters, it wrings my heart.’ Sappho was a strange compound. A woman with a white side to her character, and a black side. For weeks together, she would be a civilised being. Then she used to relapse, and

become as complete a negress as her mother. At the risk of her life she stole away, on those occasions, into the interior of the island, and looked on, in hiding, at the horrid witchcrafts and idolatries of the blacks; they would have murdered a half-blood, prying into their ceremonies, if they had discovered her. I followed her once, as far as I dared. The frightful yellings and drummings in the darkness of the forest frightened me. The blacks suspected her, and it came to my ears. I gave her the warning that saved her life (I don't know what I should have done without Sappho to amuse me!); and, from that time, I do believe the curious creature loved me. You see I can speak generously even of a slave!"

"I wonder you didn't bring her with you to England," Emily said.

"In the first place," Francine answered,



“she was my father’s property, not mine. In the second place, she’s dead. Poisoned, as the other half-bloods supposed, by some enemy among the blacks. She said herself, she was under a spell!”

“What did she mean?”

Francine was not interested enough in the subject to explain. “Stupid superstition, my dear. The negro side of Sappho was uppermost when she was dying—there is the explanation. Be off with you! I hear the old woman on the stairs. Meet her before she can come in here. My bedroom is my only refuge from Miss Ladd.”

On the morning of the last day in the week, Emily had a little talk in private with her old schoolmistress. Miss Ladd listened to what she had to say of Mrs. Ellmother, and did her best to relieve

Emily's anxieties. "I think you are mistaken, my child, in supposing that Francine is in earnest. It is her great fault that she is hardly ever in earnest. You can trust to my discretion; leave the rest to your aunt's old servant and to me."

Mrs. Ellmother arrived, punctual to the appointed time. She was shown into Miss Ladd's own room. Francine—ostentatiously resolved to take no personal part in the affair—went out for a walk. Emily waited to hear the result.

After a long interval, Miss Ladd returned to the drawing-room, and announced that she had sanctioned the engagement of Mrs. Ellmother.

"I have considered your wishes, in this respect," she said. "It is arranged that a week's notice, on either side, shall end the term of service, after the first month. I cannot feel justified in doing more than

that. Mrs. Ellmother is such a respectable woman; she is so well known to you, and she was so long in your aunt's service, that I am bound to consider the importance of securing a person who is exactly fitted to attend on such a girl as Francine. In one word, I can trust Mrs. Ellmother."

"When does she enter on her service?" Emily inquired.

"On the day after we return to the school," Miss Ladd replied. "You will be glad to see her, I am sure. I will send her here."

"One word more before you go," Emily said. "Did you ask her why she left my aunt?"

"My dear child, a woman who has been five-and-twenty years in one place is entitled to keep her own secrets. I understand that she had her reasons, and that she doesn't think it necessary to mention them to any-

body. Never trust people by halves—especially when they are people like Mrs. Ellmother."

It was too late now to raise any objections. Emily felt relieved, rather than disappointed, on discovering that Mrs. Ellmother was in a hurry to get back to London by the next train. She had found an opportunity of letting her lodgings; and she was eager to conclude the bargain. "You see I couldn't say Yes," she explained, "till I knew whether I was to get this new place or not—and the person wants to go in to-night."

Emily stopped her at the door. "Promise to write, and tell me how you get on with Miss de Sor."

"You say that, Miss, as if you didn't feel hopeful about me."

"I say it, because I feel interested about you. Promise to write."

Mrs. Ellmother promised, and hastened

away. Emily looked after her from the window, as long as she was in view. "I wish I could feel sure of Francine!" she said to herself.

"In what way?" asked the hard voice of Francine, speaking at the door.

It was not in Emily's nature to shrink from a plain reply. She completed her half-formed thought without a moment's hesitation.

"I wish I could feel sure," she answered, "that you will be kind to Mrs. Ellmother."

"Are you afraid I shall make her life one scene of torment?" Francine inquired. "How can I answer for myself? I can't look into the future."

"For once in your life, can you be in earnest?" Emily said.

"For once in your life, can you take a joke?" Francine replied.

Emily said no more. She privately resolved to shorten her visit to Brighton.



Book the Third  
NETHERWOODS.





*BOOK THE THIRD:*

**Netherwoods.**

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE GRAY ROOM.

THE house inhabited by Miss Ladd and her pupils had been built, in the early part of the present century, by a wealthy merchant—proud of his money, and eager to distinguish himself as the owner of the largest country seat in the neighbourhood.

After his death, Miss Ladd had taken Netherwoods (as the place was called); finding her own house insufficient for the accommodation of the increasing number of her pupils. A lease was granted to her on moderate terms. Netherwoods failed to attract persons of distinction in search of a

country residence. The grounds were beautiful; but no landed property—not even a park—was attached to the house. Excepting the few acres on which the building stood, the surrounding land belonged to a retired naval officer of old family, who resented the attempt of a merchant of low birth to assume the position of a gentleman. No matter what proposals might be made to the admiral, he refused them all. The privilege of shooting was not one of the attractions offered to tenants; the country presented no facilities for hunting; and the only stream in the neighbourhood was not preserved. In consequence of these drawbacks, the merchant's representatives had to choose between a proposal to use Netherwoods as a lunatic asylum, or to accept as tenant the respectable mistress of a fashionable and prosperous school. They decided in favour of Miss Ladd.

The contemplated change in Francine's position was accomplished, in that vast house, without inconvenience. There were rooms unoccupied, even when the limit assigned to the number of pupils had been reached. On the re-opening of the school, Francine was offered her choice between two rooms on one of the upper stories, and two rooms on the ground floor. She chose these last.

Her sitting-room and bed-room, situated at the back of the house, communicated with each other. The sitting room, ornamented with a pretty paper of delicate gray, and furnished with curtains of the same colour, had been accordingly named, "The Gray Room." It had a French window, which opened on the terrace overlooking the garden and the grounds. Some fine old engravings from the grand landscapes of Claude (part of a collection of prints possessed by Miss Ladd's father) hung on the walls. The carpet was

in harmony with the curtains; and the furniture was of light-coloured wood, which helped the general effect of subdued brightness that made the charm of the room. "If you are not happy here," Miss Ladd said, "I despair of you." And Francine answered, "Yes; it's very pretty, but I wish it was not so small."

On the twelfth of August the regular routine of the school was resumed. Alban Morris found two strangers in his class, to fill the vacancies left by Emily and Cecilia. Mrs. Ellmother was duly established in her new place. She produced an unfavourable impression in the servants' hall—not (as the handsome chief housemaid explained) because she was ugly and old, but because she was "a person who didn't talk." The prejudice against habitual silence, among the lower order of the people, is almost as inveterate as the prejudice against red hair.

In the evening, on that first day of renewed studies—while the girls were in the grounds, after tea—Francine had at last completed the arrangement of her rooms, and had dismissed Mrs. Ellmother (kept hard at work since the morning) to take a little rest. Standing alone at her window, the West Indian heiress wondered what she had better do next. She glanced at the girls on the lawn, and decided that they were unworthy of serious notice, on the part of a person so specially favoured as herself. She turned sideways, and looked along the length of the terrace. At the far end a tall man was slowly pacing to and fro, with his head down and his hands in his pockets. Francine recognised the rude drawing-master, who had torn up his view of the village, after she had saved it from being blown into the pond.

She stepped out on the terrace, and called to him. He stopped, and looked up.

"Do you want me?" he called back.

"Of course I do!"

She advanced a little to meet him, and offered encouragement under the form of a hard smile. Although his manners might be unpleasant, he had claims on the indulgence of a young lady, who was at a loss how to employ her idle time. In the first place, he was a man. In the second place, he was not as old as the music-master, or as ugly as the dancing-master. In the third place, he was an admirer of Emily; and the opportunity of trying to shake his allegiance by means of a flirtation, in Emily's absence, was too good an opportunity to be lost.

"Do you remember how rude you were to me, on the day when you were sketching in the summer-house?" Francine asked with snappish playfulness. "I expect you to make yourself agreeable this time—I am going to pay you a compliment."

He waited, with exasperating composure, to hear what the proposed compliment might be. The furrow between his eyebrows looked deeper than ever. There were signs of secret trouble in that dark face, so grimly and so resolutely composed. The school, without Emily, presented the severest trial of endurance that he had encountered, since the day when he had been deserted and disgraced by his affianced wife.

“You are an artist,” Francine proceeded, “and therefore a person of taste. I want to have your opinion of my sitting-room. Criticism is invited; pray come in.”

He seemed to be unwilling to accept the invitation—then altered his mind, and followed Francine. She had visited Emily; she was perhaps in a fair way to become Emily’s friend. He remembered that he had already lost an opportunity of studying her character, and—if he saw the necessity—of

warning Emily not to encourage the advances of Miss de Sor.

“Very pretty,” he remarked, looking round the room—without appearing to care for anything in it, except the prints.

Francine was bent on fascinating him. She raised her eyebrows and lifted her hands, in playful remonstrance. “Do remember it’s *my* room,” she said, “and take some little interest in it, for *my* sake!”

“What do you want me to say?” he asked.

“Come and sit down by me.” She made room for him on the sofa. Her one favourite aspiration—the longing to excite envy in others—expressed itself in her next words. “Say something pretty,” she answered; “say you would like to have such a room as this.”

“I should like to have your prints,” he remarked. “Will that do?”



“It wouldn’t do—from anybody else. Ah, Mr. Morris, I know why you are not as nice as you might be! You are not happy. The school has lost its one attraction, in losing our dear Emily. You feel it—I know you feel it.” She assisted this expression of sympathy to produce the right effect by a sigh. “What would I not give to inspire such devotion as yours! I don’t envy Emily; I only wish——” She paused in confusion, and opened her fan. “Isn’t it pretty?” she said, with an ostentatious appearance of changing the subject. Alban behaved like a monster; he began to talk of the weather.

“I think this is the hottest day we have had,” he said; “no wonder you want your fan. Netherwoods is an airless place at this season of the year.”

She controlled her temper. “I do indeed feel the heat,” she admitted, with a

resignation which gently reproved him; "it is so heavy and oppressive here, after Brighton. Perhaps my sad life, far away from home and friends, makes me sensitive to trifles? Do you think so, Mr. Morris?"

The merciless man said he thought it was the situation of the house.

"Miss Ladd took the place in the spring," he continued; "and only discovered the one objection to it some months afterwards. We are in the highest part of the valley here—but, you see, it's a valley surrounded by hills; and, on three sides the hills are near us. All very well in winter; but in summer I have heard of girls in this school, so out of health in the relaxing atmosphere, that they have been sent home again."

Francine suddenly showed an interest in what he was saying. If he had cared to observe her closely, he might have noticed it.

“Do you mean that the girls were really ill?” she asked.

“No. They slept badly—lost appetite—started at trifling noises. In short, their nerves were out of order.”

“Did they get well again at home, in another air?”

“Not a doubt of it,” he answered, beginning to get weary of the subject. “May I look at your books?”

Francine’s interest in the influence of different atmospheres on health was not exhausted yet. “Do you know where the girls lived when they were at home?” she enquired.

“I know where one of them lived. She was the best pupil I ever had—and I remember she lived in Yorkshire.” He was so weary of the idle curiosity—as it appeared to him—which persisted in asking trifling questions, that he left his seat, and

crossed the room. "May I look at your books?" he repeated.

"Oh, yes!"

The conversation was suspended for awhile. The lady thought, "I should like to box his ears!" The gentleman thought, "She's only an inquisitive fool after all!" His examination of her books confirmed him in the delusion that there was really nothing in Francine's character, which rendered it necessary to caution Emily against the advances of her new friend. Turning away from the book-case, he made the first excuse that occurred to him for putting an end to the interview.

"I must beg you to let me return to my duties, Miss de Sor. I have to correct the young ladies' drawings, before they begin again to-morrow."

Francine's wounded vanity made a last

expiring attempt to steal the heart of Emily's lover.

"You remind me that I have a favour to ask," she said. "I don't attend the other classes—but I should so like to join *your* class! May I?" She looked up at him with a languishing appearance of entreaty which sorely tried Alban's capacity to keep his face in serious order. He acknowledged the compliment paid to him, in studiously commonplace terms, and got a little nearer to the open window. Francine's obstinacy was not conquered yet.

"My education has been sadly neglected," she continued; "but I have had some little instruction in drawing. You will not find me so ignorant as some of the other girls." She waited a little, anticipating a few complimentary words. Alban waited also—in silence. "I shall look forward with pleasure to my lessons under such an

artist as yourself,” she went on, and waited again, and was disappointed again. “Perhaps,” she resumed, “I may become your favourite pupil—Who knows?”

“Who indeed!”

It was not much to say, when he spoke at last—but it was enough to encourage Francine. She called him “dear Mr. Morris;” she pleaded for permission to take her first lesson immediately; she clasped her hands—“Please say Yes!”

“I can’t say Yes, till you have complied with the rules.”

“Are they *your* rules?”

Her eyes expressed the readiest submission—in that case. He entirely failed to see it: he said they were Miss Ladd’s rules—and wished her good evening.

She watched him, walking away down the terrace. How was he paid? Did he receive a yearly salary, or did he get a little extra

money for each new pupil who took drawing lessons? In this last case, Francine saw her opportunity of being even with him. "You brute! Catch me attending your class!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## RECOLLECTIONS OF SAN DOMINGO.

THE night was oppressively hot. Finding it impossible to sleep, Francine lay quietly in her bed, thinking. The subject of her reflections was a person who occupied the humble position of her new servant.

Mrs. Ellmother looked wretchedly ill. Mrs. Ellmother had told Emily that her object, in returning to domestic service, was to try if change would relieve her from the oppression of her own thoughts. Mrs. Ellmother believed in vulgar superstitions which declared Friday to be an unlucky day; and which recommended throwing a pinch over your left shoulder, if you happened to spill the salt.



In themselves, these were trifling recollections. But they assumed a certain importance, derived from the associations which they called forth. They reminded Francine, by some mental process which she was at a loss to trace, of Sappho the slave, and of her life at San Domingo.

She struck a light, and unlocked her writing desk. From one of the drawers she took out an old household account-book.

The first page contained some entries, relating to domestic expenses, in her own handwriting. They recalled one of her efforts to occupy her idle time, by relieving her mother of the cares of housekeeping. For a day or two, she had persevered—and then she had ceased to feel any interest in her new employment. The remainder of the book was completely filled up, in a beautifully clear handwriting, beginning on

the second page. A title had been found for the manuscript by Francine. She had written at the top of the page:—*Sappho's Nonsense*.

After reading the first few sentences she rapidly turned over the leaves, and stopped at a blank space near the end of the book. Here again she had added a title. This time it implied a compliment to the writer; the page was headed:—*Sappho's Sense*.

She read this latter part of the manuscript with the closest attention.

"I entreat my kind and dear young mistress not to suppose that I believe in witchcraft—after such an education as I have received. When I wrote down, at your bidding, all that I had told you by word of mouth, I cannot imagine what delusion possessed me. You say I have a negro side to my character, which I inherit from my mother. Did you mean this, dear mistress,

as a joke? I am almost afraid it is sometimes not far off from the truth.

“Let me be careful, however, to avoid leading you into a mistake. It is really true that the man-slave I spoke of did pine and die, after the spell had been cast on him by my witch-mother’s image of wax. But I ought also to have told you that circumstances favoured the working of the spell: the fatal end was not brought about by supernatural means.

“The poor wretch was not in good health at the time; and our owner had occasion to employ him in a valley of the island far inland. I have been told, and can well believe, that the climate there is different from the climate on the coast—in which the unfortunate slave had been accustomed to live. The overseer wouldn’t believe him when he said the valley air would be his death—and the negroes, who

might otherwise have helped him, all avoided a man whom they knew to be under the spell.

"This, you see, accounts for what might appear incredible to civilised persons. If you will do me a favour, you will burn this little book, as soon as you have read what I have written here. If my request is not granted, I can only implore you to let no eyes but your own see these pages. My life might be in danger if the blacks knew what I have now told you, in the interests of truth."

Francine closed the book, and locked it up again in her desk. "Now I know," she said to herself, "what reminded me of San Domingo."

When Francine rang her bell the next morning, so long a time elapsed without producing an answer that she began to think

of sending one of the house-servants to make inquiries. Before she could decide, Mrs. Ellmother presented herself, and offered her apologies.

“It’s the first time I have over-slept myself, Miss, since I was a girl. Please to excuse me, it shan’t happen again.”

“Do you find that the air here makes you drowsy?” Francine asked.

Mrs. Ellmother shook her head. “I didn’t get to sleep,” she said, “till morning, and so I was too heavy to be up in time. But air has got nothing to do with it. Gentlefolks may have their whims and fancies. All air is the same to people like me.”

“You enjoy good health, Mrs. Ellmother.”

“Why not, Miss? I have never had a doctor.”

“Oh! That’s your opinion of doctors, is it?”

"I won't have anything to do with them—if that's what you mean by my opinion," Mrs. Ellmother answered, doggedly. "How will you have your hair done?"

"The same as yesterday. Have you seen anything of Miss Emily? She went back to London the day after you left us."

"I haven't been in London. I'm thankful to say my lodgings are let to a good tenant."

"Then where have you lived, while you were waiting to come here?"

"I had only one place to go to, Miss; I went to the village where I was born. A friend found a corner for me. Ah, dear heart, it's a pleasant place, there!"

"A place like this?"

"Lord help you! As little like this as chalk is to cheese. A fine big moor, Miss, in Cumberland, without a tree in sight—look where you may. Something like a

wind, I can tell you, when it takes to blowing there."

"Have you never been in this part of the country?"

"Not I! When I left the North, my new mistress took me to Canada. Talk about air! If there was anything in it, the people in *that* air ought to live to be a hundred. I liked Canada."

"And who was your next mistress?"

Thus far, Mrs. Ellmother had been ready enough to talk. Had she failed to hear what Francine had just said to her? or had she some reason for feeling reluctant to answer? In any case, a spirit of taciturnity took sudden possession of her—she was silent.

Francine (as usual) persisted. "Was your next place in service with Miss Emily's aunt?"

"Yes."

"Did the old lady always live in London?"

"No."

"What part of the country did she live in?"

"Kent."

"Among the hop-gardens?"

"No."

"In what other part, then?"

"Isle of Thanet."

"Near the sea coast?"

"Yes."

Even Francine could insist no longer: Mrs. Ellmother's reserve had beaten her—for that day at least. "Go into the hall," she said, "and see if there are any letters for me in the rack."

There was one letter bearing the Swiss postmark. Simple Cecilia was flattered and delighted by the charming manner in which Francine had written to her. She looked forward with impatience to the



time when their present acquaintance might ripen into friendship. Would "Dear Miss de Sor" waive all ceremony, and consent to be a guest (later in the autumn) at her father's house? Circumstances connected with her sister's health would delay their return to England for a little while. By the end of the month she hoped to be at home again, and to hear if Francine was disengaged. Her address, in England, was Monksmoor Park, Hants.

Having read the letter, Francine drew a moral from it:—"There is great use in a fool, when one knows how to manage her."

Having little appetite for her breakfast, she tried the experiment of a walk on the terrace. Alban Morris was right; the air at Netherwoods, in summer time, *was* relaxing. The morning mist still hung over the lowest part of the valley, between

the village and the hills beyond. A little exercise produced a feeling of fatigue. Francine returned to her room, and trifled with her tea and toast.

Her next proceeding was to open her writing-desk, and look into the old account book once more. While it lay open on her lap, she recalled what had passed that morning, between Mrs. Ellmother and herself.

The old woman had been born and bred in the North, on an open moor. She had been removed to the keen air of Canada when she left her birthplace. She had been in service after that, on the breezy eastward coast of Kent. Would the change to the climate of Netherwoods produce any effect on Mrs. Ellmother? At her age, and with her seasoned constitution, would she feel it as those school-girls had felt it—especially that one among them, who lived

in the bracing air of the North, the air of Yorkshire?

Weary of solitary thinking on one subject, Francine returned to the terrace with a vague idea of finding something to amuse her—that is to say, something she could turn into ridicule—if she joined the girls.

The next morning, Mrs. Ellmother answered her mistress's bell without delay. "You have slept better, this time," Francine said.

"No, Miss. When I did get to sleep, I was troubled by dreams. Another bad night—and no mistake!"

"I suspect your mind is not quite at ease," Francine suggested.

"Why do you suspect that, if you please?"

"You talked, when I met you at Miss Emily's, of wanting to get away from your own thoughts. Has the change to this place helped you?"

"It hasn't helped me as I expected. Some people's thoughts stick fast."

"Remorseful thoughts?" Francine inquired.

Mrs. Ellmother held up her forefinger, and shook it with a gesture of reproof. "I thought we agreed, Miss, that there was to be no pumping."

The business of the toilet proceeded in silence.

A week passed. During an interval in the labours of the school, Miss Ladd knocked at the door of Francine's room.

"I want to speak to you, my dear, about Mrs. Ellmother. Have you noticed that she doesn't seem to be in good health?"

"She looks rather pale, Miss Ladd."

"It's more serious than that, Francine. The servants tell me that she has hardly any appetite. She herself acknowledges that she sleeps badly. I noticed her yester-

day evening in the garden, under the schoolroom window. One of the girls dropped a dictionary. She started at that slight noise, as if it terrified her. Her nerves are seriously out of order. Can you prevail upon her to see the doctor?"

Francine hesitated—and made an excuse. "I think she would be much more likely, Miss Ladd, to listen to you. Do you mind speaking to her?"

"Certainly not!"

Mrs Ellmother was immediately sent for. "What is your pleasure, Miss?" she said to Francine.

Miss Ladd interposed. "It is I who wish to speak to you, Mrs. Ellmother. For some days past, I have been sorry to see you looking ill."

"I never was ill in my life, Ma'am."

Miss Ladd gently persisted. "I hear that you have lost your appetite."

"I never was a great eater, Ma'am."

It was evidently useless to risk any further allusion to Mrs. Ellmother's symptoms. Miss Ladd tried another method of persuasion. "I dare say I may be mistaken," she said; "but I do really feel anxious about you. To set my mind at rest, will you see the doctor?"

"The doctor! Do you think I'm going to begin taking physic, at my time of life? Lord, Ma'am! you amuse me—you do indeed!" She burst into a sudden fit of laughter; the hysterical laughter which is on the verge of tears. With a desperate effort, she controlled herself. "Please, don't make a fool of me again," she said—and left the room.

"What do you think now?" Miss Ladd asked.

Francine appeared to be still on her guard. "I don't know what to think," she said evasively.

Miss Ladd looked at her in silent surprise, and withdrew.

Left by herself, Francine sat with her elbows on the table and her face in her hands, absorbed in thought. After a long interval, she opened her desk—and hesitated. She took a sheet of rotopaper—and paused, as if still in doubt. She snatched up her pen, with a sudden recovery of resolution—and addressed these lines to the wife of her father's agent in London:

“When I was placed under your care, on the night of my arrival from the West Indies, you kindly said I might ask you for any little service which might be within your power. I shall be greatly obliged if you can obtain for me, and send to this place, a supply of artists' modelling wax—sufficient for the production of a small image.”

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## IN THE DARK.

A WEEK later, Alban Morris happened to be in Miss Ladd's study, with a report to make on the subject of his drawing-class. Mrs. Ellmother interrupted them for a moment. She entered the room to return a book which Francine had borrowed that morning.

"Has Miss de Sor done with it already?" Miss Ladd asked.

"She won't read it, ma'am. She says the leaves smell of tobacco smoke."

Miss Ladd turned to Alban, and shook her head with an air of good-humoured reproof. "I know who has been reading that book last!" she said.



Alban pleaded guilty, by a look. He was the only master in the school who smoked. As Mrs. Ellmother passed him, on her way out, he noticed the signs of suffering in her wasted face.

"That woman is surely in a bad state of health," he said. "Has she seen the doctor?"

"She flatly refuses to consult the doctor," Miss Ladd replied. "If she was a stranger, I should meet the difficulty by telling Miss de Sor (whose servant she is) that Mrs. Ellmother must be sent home. But I cannot act in that peremptory manner towards a person in whom Emily is interested."

From that moment, Mrs. Ellmother became a person in whom Alban was interested. Later in the day, he met her in one of the lower corridors of the house, and spoke to her. "I am afraid the air of

this place doesn't agree with you," he said.

Mrs. Ellmother's irritable objection to being told (even indirectly) that she looked ill, expressed itself roughly in reply. "I dare say you mean well sir—but I don't see how it matters to you whether the place agrees with me or not."

"Wait a minute," Alban answered good-humouredly. "I am not quite a stranger to you."

"How do you make that out, if you please?"

"I know a young lady who has a sincere regard for you."

"You don't mean Miss Emily?"

"Yes, I do. I respect and admire Miss Emily; and I have tried, in my poor way, to be of some little service to her."

Mrs. Ellmother's haggard face instantly softened. "Please to forgive me, sir, for

forgetting my manners," she said simply. "I have had my health since the day I was born—and I don't like to be told, in my old age, that a new place doesn't agree with me."

Alban accepted this apology in a manner which at once won the heart of the North-country-woman. He shook hands with her. "You're one of the right sort," she said; "there are not many of them in this house."

Was she alluding to Francine? Alban tried to make the discovery. Polite circumlocution would be evidently thrown away on Mrs. Ellmother. "Is your new mistress one of the right sort?" he asked bluntly.

The old servant's answer was expressed by a frowning look, followed by a plain question.

"Do you say that, sir, because you like my new mistress?"

"No."

"Please to shake hands again!" She said it—took his hand with a sudden grip that spoke for itself—and walked away.

Here was an exhibition of character, which Alban was just the man to appreciate. "If I had been an old woman," he thought in his drily humorous way, "I believe I should have been like Mrs. Ellmother. We might have talked of Emily, if she had not left me in such a hurry. When shall I see her again?"

He was destined to see her again, that night—under circumstances which he remembered to the end of his life.

The rules of Netherwoods, in summer time, recalled the young ladies from their evening's recreation in the grounds at nine o'clock. After that hour, Alban was free to smoke his pipe, and to linger among trees and flower-beds before he returned

to his hot little rooms in the village. As a relief to the drudgery of teaching the young ladies, he had been using his pencil, when the day's lessons were over, for his own amusement. It was past ten o'clock before he lit his pipe, and began walking slowly to and fro on the path which led to the summer-house, at the southern limit of the grounds.

In the perfect stillness of the night, the clock of the village church was distinctly audible, striking the hours and the quarters. The moon had not risen; but the mysterious glimmer of starlight trembled on the large open space between the trees and the house.

Alban paused, admiring with an artist's eye the effect of light, so faintly and delicately beautiful, on the broad expanse of the lawn. "Does the man live who could paint that?" he asked himself. His memory

recalled the works of the greatest of all landscape painters—the English artists of fifty years since. While recollections of many a noble picture were still passing through his mind, he was startled by the sudden appearance of a bare-headed woman on the terrace steps.

She hurried down to the lawn, staggering as she ran—stopped, and looked back at the house—hastened onwards towards the trees—stopped again, looking backwards and forwards, uncertain which way to turn next—and then advanced once more. He could now hear her heavily gasping for breath. As she came nearer, the starlight showed a panic-stricken face—the face of Mrs. Ellmother.

Alban ran to meet her. She dropped on the grass before he could cross the short distance which separated them. As he raised her in his arms, she looked at him

wildly, and murmured and muttered in the vain attempt to speak. "Look at me again," he said. "Don't you remember the man who had some talk with you to-day?" She still stared at him vacantly: he tried again. "Don't you remember Miss Emily's friend?"

As the name passed his lips, her mind in some degree recovered its balance. "Yes," she said; "Emily's friend; I'm glad I have met with Emily's friend." She caught at Alban's arm—starting, as if her own words had alarmed her. "What am I talking about? Did I say 'Emily?' A servant ought to say 'Miss Emily.' My head swims. Am I going mad?"

Alban led her to one of the garden chairs. "You're only a little frightened," he said. "Rest, and compose yourself."

She looked over her shoulder towards the house. "Not here! I've run away from a she-devil; I want to be out of sight.

Further away, Mister—I don't know your name. Tell me your name; I won't trust you, unless you tell me your name!"

"Hush! hush! Call me Alban."

"I never heard of such a name; I won't trust you."

"You won't trust your friend, and Emily's friend? You don't mean that, I'm sure. Call me by my other name—call me 'Morris.'"

"Morris?" she repeated. "Ah, I've heard of people called 'Morris.' Look back! Your eyes are young—do you see her on the terrace?"

"There isn't a living soul to be seen anywhere."

With one hand he raised her as he spoke—and with the other he took up the chair. In a minute more, they were out of sight of the house. He seated her so that she could rest her head against the trunk of a tree.



"What a good fellow!" the poor old creature said, admiring him; "he knows how my head pains me. Don't stand up! You're a tall man. She might see you."

"She can see nothing. Look at the trees behind us. Even the starlight doesn't get through them."

Mrs. Ellmother was not satisfied yet. "You take it coolly," she said. "Do you know who saw us together in the passage to-day? You good Morris, *she* saw us—she did. Wretch! Cruel, cunning, shameless wretch."

In the shadows that were round them, Alban could just see that she was shaking her clenched fists in the air. He made another attempt to control her. "Don't excite yourself! If she comes into the garden, she might hear you."

The appeal to her fears had its effect.

"That's true," she said, in lowered tones.

Sudden distrust of him seized her the next moment. "Who told me I was excited?" she burst out. "It's you who are excited. Deny it if you dare! I begin to suspect you, Mr. Morris; I don't like your conduct. What has become of your pipe? I saw you put your pipe in your coat pocket. You did it, when you set me down among the trees where *she* could see me! You are in league with her—she is coming to meet you here—you know she doesn't like tobacco smoke. Are you two going to put me in the madhouse?"

She started to her feet. It occurred to Alban that the speediest way of pacifying her might be by means of the pipe. Mere words would exercise no persuasive influence over that bewildered mind. Instant action, of some kind, would be far more likely to have the right effect. He put his pipe and his tobacco pouch into her hands,

and so mastered her attention before he spoke.

“Do you know how to fill a man’s pipe for him?” he asked.

“Haven’t I filled my husband’s pipe hundreds of times?” she answered sharply.

“Very well. Now do it for me.”

She took her chair again instantly, and filled the pipe. He lighted it, and seated himself on the grass, quietly smoking. “Do you think I’m in league with her now?” he asked; purposely adopting the rough tone of a man in her own rank of life.

She answered him as she might have answered her husband, in the days of her unhappy marriage.

“Oh, don’t gird at me—there’s a good man! If I’ve been off my head for a minute or two, please not to notice me. It’s cool and quiet here,” the poor woman said gratefully. “Bless God for

the darkness; there's something comforting in the darkness—along with a good man like you. Give me a word of advice. You are my friend in need. What am I to do? I daren't go back to the house!"

She was quiet enough now, to suggest the hope that she might be able to give Alban some information. "Were you with Miss de Sor?" he asked, "before you came out here? What did she do to frighten you?"

There was no answer; Mrs. Ellmother had abruptly risen once more. "Hush!" she whispered. "Don't I hear somebody near us?"

Alban at once went back, along the winding path which they had followed. No creature was visible in the gardens or on the terrace. On returning, he found it impossible to use his eyes to

any good purpose in the obscurity among the trees. He waited awhile, listening intently. No sound was audible: there was not even air enough to stir the leaves.

As he returned to the place that he had left, the silence was broken by the chimes of the distant church clock, striking the three quarters past ten.

Even that familiar sound jarred on Mrs. Ellmother's shattered nerves. In her state of mind and body, she was evidently at the mercy of any false alarm which might be raised by her own fears. Relieved of the feeling of distrust which had thus far troubled him, Alban sat down by her again—opened his match-box to relight the pipe—and changed his mind. Mrs. Ellmother had unconsciously warned him to be cautious.

For the first time, he thought it

likely that the heat in the house might induce some of the inmates to try the cooler atmosphere in the grounds. If this happened, and if he continued to smoke, curiosity might tempt them to follow the scent of tobacco hanging on the stagnant air.

"Is there nobody near us?" Mrs. Ellmother asked. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Now tell me—did you really mean it, when you said just now that you wanted my advice?"

"Need you ask that, sir! Who else have I got to help me?"

"I am ready and willing to help you—but I can't do it unless I know first what has passed between you and Miss de Sor. Will you trust me?"

"I will!"

"May I depend on you?"

Try me!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE TREACHERY OF THE PIPE.

ALBAN took Mrs. Ellmother at her word. "I am going to venture on a guess," he said. "You have been with Miss de Sor to-night."

"Quite true, Mr. Morris."

"I am going to guess again. Did Miss de Sor ask you to stay with her, when you went into her room?"

"That's it! She rang for me, to see how I was getting on with my needlework—and she was what I call hearty, for the first time since I have been in her service. I didn't think badly of her when she first talked of engaging me; and I've had reason to repent of my opinion ever

since. Oh, she showed the cloven foot to-night! 'Sit down,' she says; 'I've nothing to read, and I hate work; let's have a little chat.' She's got a glib tongue of her own. All I could do was to say a word now and then to keep her going. She talked and talked till it was time to light the lamp. She was particular in telling me to put the shade over it. We were half in the dark, and half in the light. She trapped me (Lord knows how!) into talking about foreign parts; I mean the place she lived in before they sent her to England. Have you heard that she comes from the West Indies?"

"Yes; I have heard that. Go on."

"Wait a bit, sir. There's something, by your leave, that I want to know. Do you believe in Witchcraft?"

"I know nothing about it. Did Miss de Sor put that question to you?"



“She did.”

“And how did you answer?”

“Neither in one way nor the other. I’m in two minds about that matter of Witchcraft. When I was a girl, there was an old woman in our village, who was a sort of show. People came to see her from all the country round—gentlefolks among them. It was her great age that made her famous. More than a hundred years old, sir! One of our neighbours didn’t believe in her age, and she heard of it. She cast a spell on his flock. I tell you, she sent a plague on his sheep, the plague of the Bots. The whole flock died; I remember it well. Some said the sheep would have had the Bots anyhow. Some said it was the spell. Which of them was right? How am I to settle it?”

“Did you mention this to Miss de Sor?”

“I was obliged to mention it. “Didn’t

I tell you, just now, that I can't make up my mind about Witchcraft? 'You don't seem to know whether you believe or disbelieve,' she says. It made me look like a fool. I told her I had my reasons—and then I was obliged to give them."

"And what did she do then?"

"She said, 'I've got a better story of Witchcraft than yours.' And she opened a little book, with a lot of writing in it, and began to read. Her story made my flesh creep. It turns me cold, sir, when I think of it now."

He heard her moaning and shuddering. Strongly as his interest was excited, there was a compassionate reluctance in him to ask her to go on. His merciful scruples proved to be needless. The fascination of beauty it is possible to resist. The fascination of horror fastens its fearful hold on us, struggle against it as we may. Mrs.

Ellmother repeated what she had heard, in spite of herself.

“It happened in the West Indies,” she said; “and the writing of a woman-slave was the writing in the little book. The slave wrote about her mother. Her mother was a black—a Witch in her own country. There was a forest in her own country. The devil taught her Witchcraft in the forest. The serpents and the wild beasts were afraid to touch her. She lived without eating. She was sold for a slave, and sent to the island—an island in the West Indies. An old man lived there; the wickedest man of them all. He filled the black Witch with devilish knowledge. She learnt to make the image of wax. The image of wax casts spells. You put pins in the image of wax. At every pin you put, the person under the spell gets nearer and nearer to death. There was a poor

black in the island. He offended the Witch. She made his image in wax; she cast spells on him. He couldn't sleep; he couldn't eat; he was such a coward that common noises frightened him. Like Me! Oh, God, like Me!"

"Wait a little," Alban interposed. "You are exciting yourself again--wait."

"You're wrong, sir! You think it ended when she finished her story, and shut up her book; there's worse to come than anything you've heard yet. I don't know what I did to offend her. She looked at me and spoke to me, as if I was the dirt under her feet. 'If you're too stupid to understand what I have been reading,' she says, 'get up and go to the glass. Look at yourself, and remember what happened to the slave who was under the spell. You're getting paler and paler, and thinner and thinner; you're pining away just as he

did. Shall I tell you why?' She snatched off the shade from the lamp, and put her hand under the table, and brought out an image of wax. *My* image! She pointed to three pins in it. 'One,' she says, 'for no sleep. One for no appetite. One for broken nerves.' I asked her what I had done to make such a bitter enemy of her. She says, 'Remember what I asked of you when we talked of your being my servant. Choose which you will do? Die by inches (I swear she said it, as I hope to be saved); 'die by inches, or tell me——'

There—in the full frenzy of the agitation that possessed her—there, Mrs. Ellmother suddenly stopped.

Alban's first impression was that she might have fainted. He looked closer, and could just see her shadowy figure still seated in the chair. He asked if she was ill. No.

"Then why don't you go on?"

"I have done," she answered.

"Do you think you can put me off," he rejoined sternly, "with such an excuse as that? What did Miss de Sor ask you to tell her? You promised to trust me. Be as good as your word."

In the days of her health and strength, she would have set him at defiance. All she could do now was to appeal to his mercy.

"Make some allowance for me," she said. "I have been terribly upset. What has become of my courage? What has broken me down in this way? Spare me, sir."

He refused to listen. "This vile attempt to practise on your fears may be repeated," he reminded her. "More cruel advantage may be taken of the nervous derangement from which you are suffering in the climate of this place. You little know me, if you think I will allow that to go on."

She made a last effort to plead with him. "Oh, sir, is this behaving like the good kind man I thought you were? You say you are Miss Emily's friend. Don't press me—for Miss Emily's sake!"

"Emily!" Alban exclaimed. "Is *she* concerned in this?"

There was a change to tenderness in his voice, which persuaded Mrs. Ellmother that she had found her way to the weak side of him. Her one effort now was to strengthen the impression which she believed herself to have produced. "Miss Emily *is* concerned in it," she confessed.

"In what way?"

"Never mind in what way."

"But I do mind."

"I tell you, sir, Miss Emily must never know it to her dying day!"

The first suspicion of the truth crossed Alban's mind.

"I understand you at last," he said. "What Miss Emily must never know—is what Miss de Sor wanted you to tell her. Oh, it's useless to contradict me! Her motive in trying to frighten you is as plain to me now as if she had confessed it. Are you sure you didn't betray yourself, when she showed the image of wax?"

"I would have died first!" The reply had hardly escaped her before she regretted it. "What makes you want to be so sure about it?" she said. "It looks as if you knew——"

"I do know."

"What!"

The kindest thing that he could do now was to speak out. "Your secret is no secret to *me*," he said.

Rage and fear shook her together. For the moment, she was like the Mrs. Ellmother of former days. "You lie!" she cried.



“I speak the truth.”

“I won’t believe you! I daren’t believe you!”

“Listen to me. In Emily’s interests, listen to me. I have read of the murder at Zeeland——”

“That’s nothing! The man was a namesake of her father.”

“The man was her father himself. Keep your seat! There is nothing to be alarmed about. I know that Emily is ignorant of the horrid death that her father died. I know that you and your late mistress have kept the discovery from her to this day. I know the love and pity which plead your excuse for deceiving her, and the circumstances that favoured the deception. My good creature, Emily’s peace of mind is as sacred to me as it is to you! I love her as I love my own life—and better. Are you calmer, now?”

He heard her crying: it was the best relief that could come to her. After waiting awhile to let the tears have their way, he helped her to rise. There was no more to be said now. The one thing to do was to take her back to the house.

"I can give you a word of advice," he said, "before we part for the night. You must leave Miss de Sor's service at once. Your health will be a sufficient excuse. Give her warning immediately."

Mrs. Ellmother hung back, when he offered her his arm. The bare prospect of seeing Francine again was revolting to her. On Alban's assurance that the notice to leave could be given in writing, she made no further resistance. The village clock struck eleven as they ascended the terrace steps.

A minute later, another person left the grounds by the path which led to the house.

Alban's precaution had been taken too late. The smell of tobacco smoke had guided Francine, when she was at a loss which way to turn next in search of Mrs. Ellmother. For the last quarter of an hour she had been listening, hidden among the trees.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## CHANGE OF AIR.

THE inmates of Netherwoods rose early, and went to bed early. When Alban and Mrs. Ellmother arrived at the back door of the house, they found it locked.

The only light visible, along the whole length of the building, glimmered through the Venetian blind of the window-entrance to Francine's sitting-room. Alban proposed to get admission to the house by that way. In her horror of again encountering Francine, Mrs. Ellmother positively refused to follow him when he turned away from the door. "They can't be all asleep yet," she said--and rang the bell.

One person was still out of bed—and that person was the mistress of the house. They recognised her voice in the customary question: “Who’s there?” The door having been opened, good Miss Ladd looked backwards and forwards between Alban and Mrs. Ellmother, with the bewildered air of a lady who doubted the evidence of her own eyes. The next moment, her sense of humour overpowered her. She burst out laughing.

“Close the door, Mr. Morris,” she said; “and be so good as to tell me what this means. Have you been giving a lesson in drawing by starlight?”

Mrs. Ellmother moved, so that the light of the lamp in Miss Ladd’s hand fell on her face. “I’m faint and giddy,” she said; “let me get to my bed.”

Miss Ladd instantly followed her. “Pray forgive me! I didn’t see you were ill,

when I spoke," she gently explained. "What can I do for you?"

"Thank you kindly, Ma'am. I want nothing but peace and quiet. I wish you good-night."

Alban followed Miss Ladd to her study, on the front side of the house. He had just mentioned the circumstances under which he and Mrs. Ellmother had met, when they were interrupted by a tap at the door. Francine had got back to her room unperceived, by way of the French window. She now presented herself, with an elaborate apology, and with the nearest approach to a penitent expression of which her face was capable.

"I am ashamed, Miss Ladd, to intrude on you at this time of night. My only excuse is, that I am anxious about Mrs. Ellmother. I heard you just now in the hall. If she is really ill, I am the unfortunate cause of it."

“In what way, Miss de Sor?”

“I am sorry to say I frightened her—while we were talking in my room—quite unintentionally. She rushed to the door, and ran out. I supposed she had gone to her bedroom; I had no idea she was in the grounds.”

In this false statement there was mingled a grain of truth. It was true that Francine believed Mrs. Ellmother to have taken refuge in her room—for she had examined the room. Finding it empty, and failing to discover the fugitive in other parts of the house, she had become alarmed, and had tried the grounds next—with the formidable result which has been already related. Concealing this circumstance, she had lied in such a skilfully artless manner that Alban (having no suspicion of what had really happened to sharpen his wits) was as completely deceived as Miss Ladd.

Proceeding to further explanation—and remembering that she was in Alban's presence—Francine was careful to keep herself within the strict limit of truth. Confessing that she had frightened her servant by a description of sorcery, as it was practised among the slaves on her father's estate, she only lied again, in declaring that Mrs. Ellmother had supposed she was in earnest, when she was guilty of no more serious offence than playing a practical joke.

In this case, Alban was necessarily in a position to detect the falsehood. But it was so evidently in Francine's interests to present her conduct in the most favourable light, that the discovery failed to excite his suspicion. He waited in silence, while Miss Ladd administered a severe reproof. Francine having left the room, as penitently as she had entered it (with her



handkerchief over her tearless eyes), he was at liberty, with certain reserves, to return to what had passed between Mrs. Ellmother and himself.

“The fright which the poor old woman has suffered,” he said, “has led to one good result. I have found her ready at last to acknowledge that she is ill, and inclined to believe that the change to Netherwoods has had something to do with it. I have advised her to take the course which you suggested, by leaving this house. Is it possible to dispense with the usual delay, when she gives notice to leave Miss de Sor’s service?”

“She need feel no anxiety, poor soul, on that account,” Miss Ladd replied. “In any case, I had arranged that a week’s notice on either side, should be enough. As it is, I will speak to Francine myself. The least she can do, to express her

regret, is to place no difficulties in Mrs. Ellmother's way."

The next day was Sunday.

Miss Ladd broke through her rule of attending to secular affairs on week days only; and, after consulting with Mrs. Ellmother, arranged with Francine that her servant should be at liberty to leave Netherwoods (health permitting) on the next day. But one difficulty remained. Mrs. Ellmother was in no condition to take the long journey to her birthplace in Cumberland; and her own lodgings in London had been let. Under these circumstances, what was the best arrangement that could be made for her? Miss Ladd wisely and kindly wrote to Emily on the subject, and asked for a speedy reply.

Later in the day, Alban was sent for to see Mrs. Ellmother. He found her anxiously waiting to hear what had

passed, on the previous night, between Miss Ladd and himself. "Were you careful, sir, to say nothing about Miss Emily?"

"I was especially careful; I never alluded to her in any way."

"Has Miss de Sor spoken to you?"

"I have not given her the opportunity."

"She's an obstinate one—she might try."

"If she does, she shall hear my opinion of her in plain words."

The talk between them turned next on Alban's discovery of the secret, of which Mrs. Ellmother had believed herself to be the sole depositary since Miss Letitia's death. Without alarming her by any needless allusion to Doctor Allday or to Miss Jethro, he answered her inquiries (so far as he was himself con-

cerned) without reserve. Her curiosity once satisfied, she showed no disposition to pursue the topic. She pointed to Miss Ladd's cat, fast asleep by the side of an empty saucer.

"Is it a sin, Mr. Morris, to wish I was Tom? *He* doesn't trouble himself about his life that is past or his life that is to come. If I could only empty my saucer, and go to sleep, I shouldn't be thinking of the number of people in this world, like myself, who would be better out of it than in it. Miss Ladd has got me my liberty to-morrow; and I don't even know where to go, when I leave this place."

"Suppose you follow Tom's example?" Alban suggested. "Enjoy to-day (in that comfortable chair) and let to-morrow take care of itself."

To-morrow arrived, and justified Alban's

system of philosophy. Emily answered Miss Ladd's letter, to excellent purpose, by telegraph.

"I leave London to-day with Cecilia," (the message announced) "for Monksmoor Park, Hants. Will Mrs. Ellmother take care of the cottage, in my absence? I shall be away for a month, at least. All is prepared for her, if she consents."

Mrs. Ellmother gladly accepted this proposal. In the interval of Emily's absence, she could easily arrange to return to her own lodgings. With words of sincere gratitude she took leave of Miss Ladd; but no persuasion would induce her to say good-bye to Francine. "Do me one more kindness, ma'am; don't tell Miss de Sor when I go away." Ignorant of the provocation which had produced this unforgiving temper of mind, Miss Ladd gently remonstrated. "Miss de Sor received my

reproof in a penitent spirit; she expresses sincere sorrow for having thoughtlessly frightened you. Both yesterday and to-day she has made kind inquiries after your health. Come! come! don't bear malice—wish her good-bye." Mrs. Ellmother's answer was characteristic. "I'll say good-bye by telegraph, when I get to London."

Her last words were addressed to Alban. "If you can find a way of doing it, sir, keep those two apart."

"Do you mean Emily and Miss de Sor?"

"Yes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know."

"Is that quite reasonable, Mrs. Ellmother?"

"I dare say not. I only know that I *am* afraid."

The pony chaise took her away. Alban's

class was not yet ready for him. He waited on the terrace.

Innocent alike of all knowledge of the serious reason for fear which did really exist, Mrs. Ellmother and Alban felt, nevertheless, the same vague distrust of an intimacy between the two girls. Idle, vain, malicious, false—to know that Francine's character presented these faults, without any discoverable merits to set against them, was surely enough to justify a gloomy view of the prospect, if she succeeded in winning the position of Emily's friend. Alban reasoned it out logically in this way—without satisfying himself, and without accounting for the remembrance that haunted him of Mrs. Ellmother's farewell look. “A commonplace man would say we are both in a morbid state of mind,” he thought; “and sometimes commonplace men turn out to be right.”

He was too deeply pre-occupied to notice that he had advanced perilously near to Francine's window. She suddenly stepped out of her room, and spoke to him.

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Morris, why Mrs. Ellmother has gone away without bidding me good-bye?"

"She was probably afraid, Miss de Sor, that you might make her the victim of another joke."

Francine eyed him steadily. "Have you any particular reason for speaking to me in that way?"

"I am not aware that I have answered you rudely—if that is what you mean."

"That is *not* what I mean. You seem to have taken a dislike to me. I should be glad to know why."

"I dislike cruelty—and you have behaved cruelly to Mrs. Ellmother."

"Meaning to be cruel?" Francine inquired.



"You know as well as I do, Miss de Sor, that I can't answer that question."

Francine looked at him again. "Am I to understand that we are enemies?" she asked.

"You are to understand," he replied, "that a person whom Miss Ladd employs to help her in teaching, cannot always presume to express his sentiments in speaking to the young ladies."

"If that means anything, Mr. Morris, it means that we are enemies."

"It means, Miss de Sor, that I am the drawing-master at this school, and that I am called to my class."

Francine returned to her room, relieved of the only doubt that had troubled her. Plainly, no suspicion that she had overheard what passed between Mrs. Ellmother and himself existed in Alban's mind. As to the use to be made of her discovery, she felt

no difficulty in deciding to wait, and be guided by events. Her curiosity and her self-esteem had been alike gratified—she had got the better of Mrs. Ellmother at last, and with that triumph she was content. While Emily remained her friend, it would be an act of useless cruelty to disclose the terrible truth. There had certainly been a coolness between them at Brighton. But Francine—still influenced by the magnetic attraction which drew her to Emily—did not conceal from herself that she had offered the provocation, and had been therefore the person to blame. “I can set all that right,” she thought, “when we meet at Monksmoor Park.” She opened her desk and wrote the shortest and sweetest of letters to Cecilia. “I am entirely at the disposal of my charming friend, on any convenient day—may I add, my dear, the sooner the better?”

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

“*THE LADY WANTS YOU, SIR.*”

THE pupils of the drawing-class put away their pencils and colour-boxes in high good humour: the teacher's vigilant eye for faults had failed him for the first time in their experience. Not one of them had been reproved; they had chattered and giggled and drawn caricatures on the margin of the paper, as freely as if the master had left the room. Alban's wandering attention was indeed beyond the reach of control. His interview with Francine had doubled his sense of responsibility towards Emily—while he was farther than ever from seeing how he could interfere, to any useful

purpose, in his present position, and with his reasons for writing under reserve.

One of the servants addressed him as he was leaving the schoolroom. The landlady's boy was waiting in the hall, with a message from his lodgings.

"Now then! what is it?" he asked, irritably.

"The lady wants you, sir." With this mysterious answer, the boy presented a visiting card. The name inscribed on it was—"Miss Jethro."

She had arrived by the train, and she was then waiting at Alban's lodgings. "Say I will be with her directly." Having given the message, he stood for awhile, with his hat in his hand—literally lost in astonishment. It was simply impossible to guess at Miss Jethro's object: and yet, with the usual perversity of human nature, he was still wondering what she could

possibly want with him, up to the final moment when he opened the door of his sitting-room.

She rose and bowed with the same grace of movement, and the same well-bred composure of manner, which Doctor Allday had noticed when she entered his consulting-room. Her dark melancholy eyes rested on Alban with a look of gentle interest. A faint flush of colour animated for a moment the faded beauty of her face—passed away again—and left it paler than before.

"I cannot conceal from myself," she began, "that I am intruding on you under embarrassing circumstances."

"May I ask, Miss Jethro, to what circumstances you allude?"

"You forget, Mr. Morris, that I left Miss Ladd's school, in a manner which justified doubt of me in the minds of strangers."

"Speaking as one of those strangers," Alban replied, "I cannot feel that I had any right to form an opinion, on a matter which only concerned Miss Ladd and yourself."

Miss Jethro bowed gravely. "You encourage me to hope," she said. "I think you will place a favourable construction on my visit when I mention my motive. I ask you to receive me, in the interests of Miss Emily Brown."

Stating her purpose in calling on him in those plain terms, she added to the amazement which Alban already felt, by handing to him—as if she was presenting an introduction—a letter marked, "Private," addressed to her by Doctor Allday.

"I may tell you," she premised, "that I had no idea of troubling you, until Doctor Allday suggested it. I wrote to him in the first instance; and there is his reply. Pray read it."

The letter was dated, "Penzance;" and the doctor wrote, as he spoke, without ceremony.

"Madam,—Your letter has been forwarded to me. I am spending my autumn holiday in the far West of Cornwall. However, if I had been at home, it would have made no difference. I should have begged leave to decline holding any further conversation with you, on the subject of Miss Emily Brown, for the following reasons:

"In the first place, though I cannot doubt your sincere interest in the young lady's welfare, I don't like your mysterious way of showing it. In the second place, when I called at your address in London, after you had left my house, I found that you had taken to flight. I place my own interpretation on this circumstance; but as it is not founded

on any knowledge of facts, I merely allude to it, and say no more."

Arrived at that point, Alban offered to return the letter. "Do you really mean me to go on reading it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said quietly.

Alban returned to the letter.

"In the third place, I have good reason to believe that you entered Miss Ladd's school as a teacher, under false pretences. After that discovery, I tell you plainly I hesitate to attach credit to any statement that you may wish to make. At the same time, I must not permit my prejudices (as you will probably call them) to stand in the way of Miss Emily's interests—supposing them to be really depending on any interference of yours. Miss Ladd's drawing-master, Mr. Alban Morris, is even more devoted to Miss Emily's service than I am. Whatever you might have said to me, you



can say to him—with this possible advantage, that *he* may believe you.”

There the letter ended. Alban handed it back in silence.

Miss Jethro pointed to the words, “Mr. Alban Morris is even more devoted to Miss Emily’s service than I am.”

“Is that true?” she asked.

“Quite true.”

“I don’t complain, Mr. Morris, of the hard things said of me in that letter; you are at liberty to suppose, if you like, that I deserve them. Attribute it to pride, or attribute it to reluctance to make needless demands on your time—I shall not attempt to defend myself. I leave you to decide whether the woman who has shown you that letter—having something important to say to you—is a person who is mean enough to say it under false pretences.”

“Tell me what I can do for you, Miss

Jethro ; and be assured, beforehand, that I don't doubt your sincerity."

"My purpose in coming here," she answered, "is to induce you to use your influence over Miss Emily Brown——"

"With what object?" Alban asked, interrupting her.

"My object is her own good. Some years since, I happened to become acquainted with a person who has attained some celebrity as a preacher. You have perhaps heard of Mr. Miles Mirabel?"

"I have heard of him."

"I have been in correspondence with him," Miss Jethro proceeded. "He tells me he has been introduced to a young lady, who was formerly one of Miss Ladd's pupils, and who is the daughter of Mr. Wyvil, of Monksmoor Park. He has called on Mr. Wyvil ; and he has since received an invitation to stay at Mr. Wyvil's house. The day

fixed for the visit is Monday, the fifth of next month."

Alban listened—at a loss to know what interest he was supposed to have in being made acquainted with Mr. Mirabel's engagements. Miss Jethro's next words enlightened him.

"You are perhaps aware," she resumed, "that Miss Emily Brown is Miss Wyvil's intimate friend. She will be one of the guests at Monksmoor Park. If there are any obstacles which you can place in her way—if there is any influence which you can exert, without exciting suspicion of your motive—prevent her, I entreat you, from accepting Miss Wyvil's invitation, until Mr. Mirabel's visit has come to an end."

"Is there anything against Mr. Mirabel?" Alban asked.

"I say nothing against him."

"Is Miss Emily acquainted with him?"

“ No.”

“ Is he a person with whom it would be disagreeable to her to associate ? ”

“ Quite the contrary.”

“ And yet you expect me to prevent them from meeting ! Be reasonable, Miss Jethro.”

“ I can only be in earnest, Mr. Morris—more truly, more deeply in earnest than you can suppose. I declare to you that I am speaking in Miss Emily’s interests. Do you still refuse to exert yourself for her sake ? ”

“ I am spared the pain of refusal,” Alban answered. “ The time for interference has gone by. She is, at this moment, on her way to Monksmoor Park.”

Miss Jethro attempted to rise—and dropped back into her chair. “ Water ! ” she said faintly. After drinking from the glass to the last drop, she began to revive. Her little travelling-bag was on the floor at her

side. She took out a railway guide, and tried to consult it. Her fingers trembled incessantly; she was unable to find the page to which she wished to refer. “Help me,” she said, “I must leave this place—by the first train that passes.”

“To see Emily?” Alban asked.

“Quite useless! You have said it yourself—the time for interference has gone by. Look at the guide.”

“What place shall I look for?”

“Look for Vale Regis.”

Alban found the place. The train was due in ten minutes. “Surely you are not fit to travel so soon?” he suggested.

“Fit or not, I must see Mr. Mirabel—I must make the effort to keep them apart by appealing to *him*.”

“With any hope of success?”

“With no hope—and with no interest in the man himself. Still I must try.”

"Out of anxiety for Emily's welfare?"

"Out of anxiety for more than that."

"For what?"

"If you can't guess, I daren't tell you."

That strange reply startled Alban. Before he could ask what it meant, Miss Jethro had left him.

In the emergencies of life, a person readier of resource than Alban Morris it would not have been easy to discover. The extraordinary interview that had now come to an end had found his limits. Bewildered and helpless, he stood at the window of his room, and asked himself (as if he had been the weakest man living), "What shall I do?"

Book the Fourth:

THE COUNTRY HOUSE.





*BOOK THE FOURTH:*

*The Country House.*

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DANCING.

THE windows of the long drawing-room at Monksmoor are all thrown open to the conservatory. Distant masses of plants and flowers, mingled in ever-varying forms of beauty, are touched by the melancholy lustre of the rising moon. Nearer to the house, the restful shadows are disturbed at intervals, where streams of light fall over them aslant from the lamps in the room. The fountain is playing. In rivalry with its lighter music, the nightingales are singing their song of ecstasy. Sometimes, the laughter of girls is heard—and, some-

times, the melody of a waltz. The younger guests at Monksmoor are dancing.

Emily and Cecilia are dressed alike in white, with flowers in their hair. Francine rivals them by means of a gorgeous contrast of colour, and declares that she is rich with the bright emphasis of diamonds and the soft persuasion of pearls. Miss Plym (from the rectory) is fat and fair and prosperous; she overflows with good spirits; she has a waist which defies tight lacing, and she dances joyously on large flat feet. Miss Darnaway (officer's daughter, with small means) is the exact opposite of Miss Plym. She is thin and tall and faded—poor soul. Destiny has made it her hard lot in life to fill the place of head-nursemaid at home. In her pensive moments, she thinks of the little brothers and sisters, whose patient servant she is, and wonders who comforts

them in their tumbles and tells them stories at bed-time, while she is holiday-making at the pleasant country house.

Tender-hearted Cecilia, remembering how few pleasures this young friend has, and knowing how well she dances, never allows her to be without a partner. There are three invaluable young gentlemen present, who are excellent dancers. Members of different families, they are nevertheless fearfully and wonderfully like each other. They present the same rosy complexions and straw-coloured mustachios, the same plump cheeks, vacant eyes and low foreheads; and they utter, with the same stolid gravity, the same imbecile small talk. On sofas facing each other, sit the two remaining guests, who have not joined the elders at the card-table in another room. They are both men. One of them is drowsy and middle-aged—happy in the

possession of large landed property ; happier still in a capacity for drinking Mr. Wyvil's famous port-wine without gouty results.

The other gentleman—ah, who is the other ? He is the confidential adviser and bosom friend of every young lady in the house. Is it necessary to name the Reverend Miles Mirabel ?

There he sits enthroned, with room for a fair admirer on either side of him—the clerical sultan of a platonic harem. His persuasive ministry is felt as well as heard : he has an innocent habit of fondling young persons. One of his arms is even long enough to embrace the circumference of Miss Plym—while the other clasps the rigid silken waist of Francine. “I do it everywhere else,” he says innocently, “why not here ?” Why not indeed—with that delicate com-

plexion and those beautiful blue eyes; with the glorious golden hair that rests on his shoulders, and the glossy beard that flows over his breast? Familiarities, forbidden to mere men, become privileges and condescensions when an angel enters society—and more especially when that angel has enough of mortality in him to be amusing. Mr. Mirabel, on his social side, is an irresistible companion. He is cheerfulness itself; he takes a favourable view of everything; his sweet temper never differs with anybody. “In my humble way,” he confesses, “I like to make the world about me brighter.” Laughter (harmlessly produced, observe!) is the element in which he lives and breathes. Miss Darnaway’s serious face puts him out; he has laid a bet with Emily—not in money, not even in gloves, only in flowers—that he will make Miss

Darnaway laugh; and he has won the wager. Emily's flowers are in his button-hole, peeping through the curly interstices of his beard. "Must you leave me?" he asks tenderly, when there is a dancing man at liberty, and it is Francine's turn to claim him. She leaves her seat not very willingly. For a while, the place is vacant; Miss Plym seizes the opportunity of consulting the ladies' bosom friend.

"Dear Mr. Mirabel, do tell me what you think of Miss de Sor?"

Dear Mr. Mirabel bursts into enthusiasm, and makes a charming reply. His large experience of young ladies warns him that they will tell each other what he thinks of them, when they retire for the night; and he is careful, on these occasions, to say something that will bear repetition.

“I see in Miss de Sor,” he declares, “the resolution of a man, tempered by the sweetness of a woman. When that interesting creature marries, her husband will be—shall I use the vulgar word?—henpecked. Dear Miss Plym, he will enjoy it; and he will be quite right too; and, if I am asked to the wedding, I shall say, with heart-felt sincerity, En-viable man!”

In the height of her admiration of Mr. Mirabel’s wonderful eye for character, Miss Plym is called away to the piano. Cecilia succeeds to her friend’s place—and has her waist taken in charge as a matter of course.

“How do you like Miss Plym?” she asks directly.

Mr. Mirabel smiles, and shows the prettiest little pearly teeth. “I was just thinking of her,” he confesses pleasantly.

“Miss Plym is so nice and plump, so comforting and domestic—such a perfect clergyman’s daughter. You love her, don’t you? Is she engaged to be married? In that case—between ourselves, dear Miss Wyvil, a clergyman is obliged to be cautious—I may own that I love her too.”

Delicious titillations of flattered self-esteem betray themselves in Cecilia’s lovely complexion. She is the chosen confidante of this irresistible man; and she would like to express her sense of obligation. But Mr. Mirabel is a master in the art of putting the right words in the right places; and simple Cecilia distrusts herself and her grammar.

At that moment of embarrassment, a friend leaves the dance, and helps Cecilia out of the difficulty.

Emily approaches the sofa-throne, breathless—followed by her partner, entreating her



to give him "one turn more." She is not to be tempted; she means to rest. Cecilia sees an act of mercy, suggested by the presence of the disengaged young man. She seizes his arm, and hurries him off to poor Miss Darnaway; sitting forlorn in a corner, and thinking of the nursery at home.

In the meanwhile, a circumstance occurs. Mr. Mirabel's all-embracing arm shows itself in a new character, when Emily sits by his side.

It becomes, for the first time, an irresolute arm. It advances a little—and hesitates. Emily at once administers an unexpected check; she insists on preserving a free waist, in her own outspoken language. "No, Mr. Mirabel, keep that for the others. You can't imagine how ridiculous you and your young ladies look, and how absurdly unaware of it you all seem to be." For the first time in his life, the reverend and ready-

witted man of the world is at a loss for an answer. Why?

For this simple reason. He too has felt the magnetic attraction of the irresistible little creature whom everyone likes. Miss Jethro has been doubly defeated. She has failed to keep them apart; and her unexplained misgivings have not been justified by events: Emily and Mr. Mirabel are good friends already. The brilliant clergyman is poor; his interests in life point to a marriage for money; he has fascinated the heiresses of two rich fathers, Mr. Wyvil and Mr. de Sor—and yet he is conscious of an influence (an alien influence, without a balance at its bankers), which has, in some mysterious way, got between him and his interests.

On Emily's side, the attraction felt is of another nature altogether. Among the merry young people at Monksmoor she is her old happy self again; and she finds in

Mr. Mirabel the most agreeable and amusing man whom she has ever met. After those dismal night watches by the bed of her dying aunt, and the dreary weeks of solitude that followed, to live in this new world of luxury and gaiety is like escaping from the darkness of night, and basking in the full brightness of day. Cecilia declares that she looks, once more, like the joyous queen of the bedroom, in the by-gone time at school ; and Francine (profaning Shakespeare without knowing it), says, “Emily is herself again !”

“Now that your arm is in its right place, reverend sir,” she gaily resumes, “I may admit that there are exceptions to all rules. My waist is at your disposal, in a case of necessity—that is to say, in a case of waltzing.”

“The one case of all others,” Mirabel answers, with the engaging frankness that

has won him so many friends, “which can never happen in my unhappy experience. Waltzing, I blush to own it, means picking me up off the floor, and putting smelling salts to my nostrils. In other words, dear Miss Emily, it is the room that waltzes—not I. I can’t look at those whirling couples there, with a steady head. Even the exquisite figure of our young hostess, when it describes flying circles, turns me giddy.”

Hearing this allusion to Cecilia, Emily drops to the level of the other girls. She too pays her homage to the Pope of private life. “You promised me your unbiassed opinion of Cecilia,” she reminds him; “and you haven’t given it yet.”

The ladies’ friend gently remonstrates. “Miss Wyvil’s beauty dazzles me. How can I give an unbiassed opinion? Besides, I am not thinking of her; I can only think of you.”

Emily lifts her eyes, half merrily, half

tenderly, and looks at him over the top of her fan. It is her first effort at flirtation. She is tempted to engage in the most interesting of all games to a girl—the game which plays at making love. What has Cecilia told her, in those bedroom gossipings, dear to the hearts of the two friends? Cecilia has whispered, “Mr. Mirabel admires your figure; he calls you ‘the Venus of Milo, in a state of perfect abridgment.’” Where is the daughter of Eve, who would not have been flattered by that pretty compliment—who would not have talked soft nonsense in return? “You can only think of Me,” Emily repeats coquettishly. “Have you said that to the last young lady who occupied my place, and will you say it again to the next who follows me?”

“Not to one of them! Mere compliments are for the others—not for you.”

“What is for me, Mr. Mirabel?”

"What I have just offered to you—a confession of the truth."

Emily is startled by the tone in which he replies. He seems to be in earnest; not a vestige is left of the easy gaiety of his manner. His face shows an expression of anxiety which she has never seen in it yet. "Do you believe me?" he asks in a whisper.

She tries to change the subject. "When am I to hear you preach, Mr. Mirabel?"

He persists. "When you believe me," he says.

His eyes add an emphasis to that reply which is not to be mistaken. Emily turns away from him, and notices Francine. She has left the dance, and is looking with marked attention at Emily and Mirabel. "I want to speak to you," she says, and beckons impatiently to Emily.

Mirabel whispers, "Don't go!"

Emily rises nevertheless—ready to avail herself of the first excuse for leaving him. Francine meets her half way, and takes her roughly by the arm.

“What is it?” Emily asks.

“Suppose you leave off flirting with Mr. Mirabel, and make yourself of some use?”

“In what way?”

“Use your ears—and look at that girl.”

She points disdainfully to innocent Miss Plym. The rector’s daughter possesses all the virtues, with one exception—the virtue of having an ear for music. When she sings, she is out of tune; and, when she plays, she murders time.

“Who can dance to such music as that?” says Francine. “Finish the waltz for her.”

Emily naturally hesitates. “How can I take her place, unless she asks me?”

Francine laughs scornfully. "Say at once, you want to go back to Mr. Mirabel."

"Do you think I should have got up, when you beckoned to me," Emily rejoins, "if I had not wanted to get away from Mr. Mirabel?"

Instead of resenting this sharp retort, Francine suddenly breaks into good humour. "Come along, you little spit-fire; I'll manage it for you."

She leads Emily to the piano, and stops Miss Plym without a word of apology: "It's your turn to dance now. Here's Miss Brown waiting to relieve you."

Cecilia has not been unobservant, in her own quiet way, of what has been going on. Waiting until Francine and Miss Plym are out of hearing, she bends over Emily, and says, "My dear, I really do think Francine is in love with Mr. Mirabel."



“After having only been a week in the same house with him!” Emily exclaims.

“At any rate,” says Cecilia, more smartly than usual, “she is jealous of *you*.”

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## FEIGNING.

THE next morning, Mr. Mirabel took two members of the circle at Monksmoor by surprise. One of them was Emily; and one of them was the master of the house.

Seeing Emily alone in the garden before breakfast, he left his room, and joined her. "Let me say one word," he pleaded, "before we go to breakfast. I am grieved to think that I was so unfortunate as to offend you, last night?"

Emily's look of astonishment answered for her before she could speak. "What can I have said or done," she asked, "to make you think that?"

"Now I breathe again!" he cried, with

the boyish gaiety of manner which was one of the secrets of his popularity among women. "I really feared that I had spoken thoughtlessly. It is a terrible confession for a clergyman to make—but it is not the less true that I am one of the most indiscreet men living. It is my rock ahead in life that I say the first thing which comes uppermost, without stopping to think. Being well aware of my own defects, I naturally distrust myself."

"Even in the pulpit?" Emily inquired.

He laughed with the readiest appreciation of the satire—although it was directed against himself.

"I like that question," he said; "it tells me we are as good friends again as ever. The fact is, the sight of the congregation, when I get into the pulpit, has the same effect upon me that the sight of the footlights has on an actor. All

oratory (though my clerical brethren are shy of confessing it) is acting—without the scenery and the costumes. Did you really mean it, last night, when you said you would like to hear me preach?"

"Indeed, I did."

"How very kind of you. I don't think myself the sermon is worth the sacrifice. (There is another specimen of my indiscreet way of talking!). What I mean is, that you will have to get up early on Sunday morning, and drive twelve miles to the damp and dismal little village, in which I officiate for a man with a rich wife who likes the climate of Italy. My congregation works in the fields all the week, and naturally enough goes to sleep in church on Sunday. I have had to counteract that. Not by preaching! I wouldn't puzzle the poor people with my

eloquence for the world. No, no; I tell them little stories out of the Bible—in a nice easy gossiping way. A quarter of an hour is my limit of time; and, I am proud to say, some of them (mostly the women), do to a certain extent keep awake. If you and the other ladies decide to honour me, it is needless to say you shall have one of my grand efforts. What will be the effect on my unfortunate flock remains to be seen. I will have the church brushed up, and luncheon of course at the parsonage. Beans, bacon and beer—I hav'n't got anything else in the house. Are you rich? I hope not!”

“I suspect I am quite as poor as you are, Mr. Mirabel.”

“I am delighted to hear it. (More of my indiscretion)! Our poverty is another bond between us.”

Before he could enlarge on this text the breakfast bell rang.

He gave Emily his arm, quite satisfied with the result of the morning's talk. In speaking seriously to her on the previous night, he had committed the mistake of speaking too soon. To amend this false step, and to recover his position in Emily's estimation, had been his object in view—and it had been successfully accomplished. At the breakfast-table, that morning, the companionable clergyman was more amusing than ever.

The meal being over, the company dispersed as usual—with the one exception of Mirabel. Without any apparent reason, he kept his place at the table. Mr. Wyvil, the most courteous and considerate of men, felt it an attention due to his guest not to leave the room first. All that he could venture to do was to give

a little hint. "Have you any plans for the morning?" he asked.

"I have a plan that depends entirely on yourself," Mirabel answered; "and I am afraid of being as indiscreet as usual, if I mention it. Your charming daughter tells me you play on the violin."

Modest Mr. Wyvil looked confused. "I hope you have not been annoyed," he said; "I practice in a distant room so that nobody may hear me."

"My dear sir, I am eager to hear you! Music is my passion; and the violin is my favourite instrument."

Mr. Wyvil led the way to his room, positively blushing with pleasure. Since the death of his wife he had been sadly in want of a little encouragement. His daughters and his friends were careful—over-careful as he thought—of intruding on him in his hours of practice. And, sad

to say, his daughters and his friends were, from a musical point of view, perfectly right.

Literature has hardly paid sufficient attention to a social phenomenon of a singularly perplexing kind. We hear enough, and more than enough, of persons who successfully cultivate the Arts—of the remarkable manner in which fitness for their vocation shows itself in early life, of the obstacles which family prejudice places in their way, and of the unremitting devotion which has led to the achievement of glorious results.

But how many writers have noticed those other incomprehensible persons, members of families innocent for generations past of practicing Art or caring for Art, who have notwithstanding displayed from their earliest years the irresistible desire to cultivate poetry, painting, or



music; who have surmounted obstacles, and endured disappointments, in the single-hearted resolution to devote their lives to an intellectual pursuit—being absolutely without the capacity which proves the vocation, and justifies the sacrifice. Here is Nature, “unerring Nature,” presented in flat contradiction with herself. Here are men bent on performing feats of running, without having legs; and women, hopelessly barren, living in constant expectation of large families to the end of their days. The musician is not to be found, more completely deprived than Mr. Wyvil of natural capacity for playing on an instrument—and, for twenty years past, it had been the pride and delight of his heart to let no day of his life go by without practicing on the violin.

“I am sure I must be tiring you,” he

said politely—after having played without mercy for an hour and more.

No: the insatiable amateur had his own purpose to gain, and was not exhausted yet. Mr. Wyvil got up to look for some more music. In that interval desultory conversation naturally took place. Mirabel contrived to give it the necessary direction—the direction of Emily.

“The most delightful girl I have met with for many a long year past!” Mr. Wyvil declared warmly. “I don’t wonder at my daughter being so fond of her. She leads a solitary life at home, poor thing; and I am honestly glad to see her spirits reviving in my house.”

“An only child?” Mirabel asked.

In the necessary explanation that followed, Emily’s isolated position in the world was revealed in few words. But one more discovery—the most important of all—remained

to be made. Had she used a figure of speech in saying that she was as poor as Mirabel himself? or had she told him the shocking truth? He put the question with perfect delicacy—but with unerring directness as well.

Mr. Wyvil, quoting his daughter's authority, described Emily's income as falling short even of two hundred a year. Having made that disheartening reply, he opened another music book. "You know this sonata, of course?" he said. The next moment, the violin was under his chin, and the performance began.

While Mirabel was, to all appearance, listening with the utmost attention, he was actually endeavouring to reconcile himself to a serious sacrifice of his own inclinations. If he remained much longer in the same house with Emily, the impression that she had produced on him would be certainly

strengthened—and he would be guilty of the folly of making an offer of marriage to a woman who was as poor as himself. The one remedy that could be trusted to preserve him from such infatuation as this, was absence. At the end of the week, he had arranged to return to Vale Regis for his Sunday duty; engaging to join his friends again at Monksmoor on the Monday following. That rash promise, there could be no further doubt about it, must not be fulfilled.

He had arrived at this resolution, when the terrible activity of Mr. Wyvil's bow was suspended by the appearance of a third person in the room.

Cecilia's maid was charged with a neat little three-cornered note from her young lady, to be presented to her master. Wondering why his daughter should write to him, Mr. Wyvil opened the note, and was informed of Cecilia's motive in these words:

“DEAREST PAPA,—I hear Mr. Mirabel is with you, and as this is a secret, I must write. Emily has received a very strange letter this morning, which puzzles her and alarms me. When you are quite at liberty, we shall be so much obliged if you will tell us how Emily ought to answer it.”

Mr. Wyvil stopped Mirabel, on the point of trying to escape from the music. “A little domestic matter to attend to,” he said. “But we will finish the sonata first.”

## CHAPTER XL.

## CONSULTING.

OUT of the music room, and away from his violin, the sound side of Mr. Wyvil's character was free to assert itself. In his public and in his private capacity, he was an eminently sensible man.

As a member of parliament, he set an example which might have been followed with advantage by many of his colleagues. In the first place, he abstained from hastening the downfall of representative institutions by asking questions and making speeches. In the second place, he was able to distinguish between the duty that he owed to his party, and the duty that he

owed to his country. When the Legislature acted politically—that is to say, when it dealt with foreign complications, or electoral reforms—he followed his leader. When the Legislature acted socially—that is to say, for the good of the people—he followed his conscience. On the last occasion when the great Russian bugbear provoked a division, he voted submissively with his Conservative allies. But, when the question of opening museums and picture galleries on Sundays arrayed the two parties in hostile camps, he broke into open mutiny, and went over to the Liberals. He consented to help in preventing an extension of the franchise; but he refused to be concerned in obstructing the repeal of taxes on knowledge. “I am doubtful in the first case,” he said, “but I am sure, in the second.” He was asked for an explanation: “Doubtful of what?

and sure of what?" To the astonishment of his leader, he answered: "The benefit to the people." The same sound sense appeared in the transactions of his private life. Lazy and dishonest servants found that the gentlest of masters had a side to his character which took them by surprise. And, on certain occasions in the experience of Cecilia and her sister, the most indulgent of fathers proved to be as capable of saying No, as the sternest tyrant who ever ruled a fire-side.

Called into council by his daughter and his guest, Mr. Wyvil assisted them by advice which was equally wise and kind—but which afterwards proved, under the perverse influence of circumstances, to be advice that he had better not have given.

The letter to Emily which Cecilia had recommended to her father's consideration,



had come from Netherwoods, and had been written by Alban Morris.

He assured Emily that he had only decided on writing to her, after some hesitation, in the hope of serving interests which he did not himself understand, but which might prove to be interests worthy of consideration, nevertheless. Having stated his motive in these terms, he proceeded to relate what had passed between Miss Jethro and himself. On the subject of Francine, Alban only ventured to add that she had not produced a favourable impression on him, and that he could not think her likely, on further experience, to prove a desirable friend.

On the last leaf were added some lines, which Emily was at no loss how to answer. She had folded back the page, so that no eyes but her own should see how the poor drawing-master finished his letter;—"I wish

you all possible happiness, my dear, among your new friends; but don't forget the old friend who thinks of you, and dreams of you, and longs to see you again. The little world I live in is a dreary world, Emily, in your absence. Will you write to me now and then, and encourage me to hope?"

Mr. Wyvil smiled, as he looked at the folded page, which hid the signature.

"I suppose I may take it for granted," he said slyly, "that this gentleman really has your interests at heart? May I know who he is?"

Emily answered the last question readily enough. Mr. Wyvil went on with his inquiries. "About the mysterious lady, with the strange name," he proceeded—"do you know anything of her?"

Emily related what she knew; without revealing the true reason for Miss Jethro's departure from Netherwoods. In after years,

it was one of her most treasured remembrances, that she had kept secret the melancholy confession which had startled her, on the last night of her life at school.

Mr. Wyvil looked at Alban's letter again. "Do you know how Miss Jethro became acquainted with Mr. Mirabel?" he asked.

"I didn't even know that they were acquainted."

"Do you think it likely—if Mr. Morris had been talking to you instead of writing to you—that he might have said more than he has said in his letter?"

Cecilia had hitherto remained a model of discretion. Seeing Emily hesitate, temptation overcame her. "Not a doubt of it, Papa!" she declared confidently.

"Is Cecilia right?" Mr. Wyvil inquired

Reminded in this way of her influence over Alban, Emily could only make one honest reply. She admitted that Cecilia was right.

Mr. Wyvil thereupon advised her not to express any opinion, until she was in a better position to judge for herself. "When you write to Mr. Morris," he continued, "say that you will wait to tell him what you think of Miss Jethro, until you see him again."

"I have no prospect at present of seeing him again," Emily said.

"You can see Mr. Morris whenever it suits him to come here," Mr. Wyvil replied. "I will write and ask him to visit us, and you can enclose the invitation in your letter."

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, how good of you!"

"Oh, Papa, the very thing I was going to ask you to do!"

The excellent master of Monksmoor looked unaffectedly surprised. "What are you two young ladies making a fuss about?" he said. "Mr. Morris is a gentleman by profession; and—may I venture to say it, Miss Emily?—a valued friend of yours as well. Who has a better claim to be one of my guests?"

Cecilia stopped her father as he was about to leave the room. "I suppose we mustn't ask Mr. Mirabel what he knows of Miss Jethro?" she said.

"My dear, what can you be thinking of! What right have we to question Mr. Mirabel about Miss Jethro?"

"It's so very unsatisfactory, Papa. There must be some reason why Emily and Mr. Mirabel ought not to meet—or why should Miss Jethro have been so very earnest about it?"

"Miss Jethro doesn't intend us to know

why, Cecilia. It will perhaps come out in time. Wait for time.”

Left together, the girls discussed the course which Alban would probably take, on receiving Mr. Wyvil's invitation.

“He will only be too glad,” Cecilia asserted, “to have the opportunity of seeing you again.”

“I doubt whether he will care about seeing me again, among strangers,” Emily replied. “And you forget that there are obstacles in his way. How is he to leave his class?”

“Quite easily! His class doesn't meet on the Saturday half holiday. He can be here, if he starts early, in time for luncheon; and he can stay till Monday or Tuesday.”

“Who is to take his place at the school?”

“Miss Ladd, to be sure—if *you* make

a point of it. Write to her, as well as to Mr. Morris."

The letters being written — and the order having been given to prepare a room for the expected guest—Emily and Cecilia returned to the drawing-room. They found the elders of the party variously engaged—the men with newspapers, and the ladies with work. Entering the conservatory next, they discovered Cecilia's sister languishing among the flowers in an easy-chair. Constitutional laziness, in some young ladies, assumes an invalid character, and presents the interesting spectacle of perpetual convalescence. The doctor declared that the baths at St. Moritz had cured Miss Julia. Miss Julia declined to agree with the doctor.

"Come into the garden, with Emily and me," Cecilia said.

"Emily and you don't know what it is to be ill," Julia answered.

The two girls left her, and joined the young people who were amusing themselves in the garden. Francine had taken possession of Mirabel, and had condemned him to hard labour in swinging her. He made an attempt to get away when Emily and Cecilia approached, and was peremptorily re-called to his duty. "Higher!" cried Miss De Sor, in her hardest tones of authority. "I want to swing higher than anybody else!" Mirabel submitted with gentleman-like resignation, and was rewarded by tender encouragement expressed in a look.

"Do you see that?" Cecilia whispered. "He knows how rich she is—I wonder whether he will marry her."

Emily smiled. "I doubt it, while he is in this house," she said. "You are as



rich as Francine—and don't forget that you have other attractions as well."

Cecilia shook her head. "Mr. Mirabel is very nice," she admitted; "but I wouldn't marry him. Would you?"

Emily secretly compared Alban with Mirabel. "Not for the world!" she answered.

The next day was the day of Mirabel's departure. His admirers among the ladies followed him out to the door, at which Mr. Wyvil's carriage was waiting. Francine threw a nosegay after the departing guest as he got in. "Mind you come back to us on Monday!" she said. Mirabel bowed and thanked her; but his last look was for Emily, standing apart from the others at the top of the steps. Francine said nothing. Her lips closed convulsively—she turned suddenly pale.

## CHAPTER XII.

## SPEECHIFYING.

ON the Monday, a ploughboy from Vale Regis arrived at Monksmoor.

In respect of himself, he was a person beneath notice. In respect of his errand, he was sufficiently important to cast a gloom over the household. The faithless Mirabel had broken his engagement, and the ploughboy was the herald of misfortune who brought his apology. To his great disappointment (he wrote) he was detained by the affairs of his parish. He could only trust to Mr. Wyvil's indulgence to excuse him, and to communicate his sincere sense of regret (on scented note paper) to the ladies.

Everybody believed in the affairs of the parish—with the exception of Francine. “Mr. Mirabel has made the best excuse he could think of for shortening his visit; and I don’t wonder at it,” she said, looking significantly at Emily.

Emily was playing with one of the dogs; exercising him in the tricks which he had learnt. She balanced a morsel of sugar on his nose—and had no attention to spare for Francine.

Cecilia, as the mistress of the house, felt it her duty to interfere. “That is a strange remark to make,” she answered. “Do you mean to say that we have driven Mr. Mirabel away from us?”

“I accuse nobody,” Francine began with spiteful candour.

“Now she’s going to accuse everybody!” Emily interposed, addressing herself facetiously to the dog.

"But when girls are bent on fascinating men, whether they like it or not," Francine proceeded, "men have only one alternative—they must keep out of the way." She looked again at Emily, more pointedly than ever.

Even gentle Cecilia resented this. "Whom do you refer to?" she said, sharply.

"My dear!" Emily remonstrated, "need you ask?" She glanced at Francine as she spoke, and then gave the dog his signal. He tossed up the sugar, and caught it in his mouth. His audience applauded him—and so for that time, the skirmish ended.

Among the letters of the next morning's delivery, arrived Alban's reply. Emily's anticipations proved to be correct. The drawing-master's duties would not permit him to leave Netherwoods; and he, like Mirabel, sent his apologies. His short letter to Emily contained no further allusion to

Miss Jethro: it began and ended on the first page.

Had he been disappointed by the tone of reserve in which Emily had written to him, under Mr. Wyvil's advice? Or (as Cecilia suggested) had his detention at the school so bitterly disappointed him that he was too disheartened to write at any length? Emily made no attempt to arrive at a conclusion, either one way or the other. She seemed to be in depressed spirits; and she spoke superstitiously, for the first time in Cecilia's experience of her.

"I don't like this reappearance of Miss Jethro," she said. "If the mystery about that woman is ever cleared up, it will bring trouble and sorrow to me—and I believe, in his own secret heart, Alban Morris thinks so too."

"Write, and ask him," Cecilia suggested.

"He is so kind and so unwilling to distress me," Emily answered, "that he wouldn't acknowledge it, even if I am right."

In the middle of the week, the course of private life at Monksmoor suffered an interruption—due to the parliamentary position of the master of the house.

The insatiable appetite for making and hearing speeches, which represents one of the marked peculiarities of the English race (including their cousins in the United States), had seized on Mr. Wyvil's constituents. There was to be a political meeting at the market hall, in the neighbouring town; and the member was expected to make an oration, passing in review contemporary events at home and abroad. "Pray don't think of accompanying me," the good man said to his guests. "The hall is badly ventilated; and the

speeches, including my own, will not be worth hearing."

This humane warning was ungratefully disregarded. The gentlemen were all interested in "the objects of the meeting;" and the ladies were firm in the resolution not to be left at home by themselves. They dressed with a view to the large assembly of spectators before whom they were about to appear; and they out-talked the men on political subjects, all the way to the town.

The most delightful of surprises was in store for them, when they reached the market hall. Among the crowd of ordinary gentlemen, waiting under the portico until the proceedings began, appeared one person of distinction, whose title was "Reverend," and whose name was Mirabel.

Francine was the first to discover him. She darted up the steps, and held out her hand.

"This *is* a pleasure!" she cried. "Have you come here to see—" she was about to say *Me*, but, observing the strangers round her, altered the word to *Us*. "Please give me your arm," she whispered, before her young friends had arrived within hearing. "I am so frightened in a crowd!"

She held fast by Mirabel, and kept a jealous watch on him. Was it only her fancy? or did she detect a new charm in his smile when he spoke to Emily?

Before it was possible to decide, the time for the meeting had arrived. Mr. Wyvil's friends were of course accommodated with seats on the platform. Francine, still insisting on her claim to Mirabel's arm, got a chair next to him. As she seated herself, she left him free for a moment. In that moment, the infatuated man took an empty chair on the other side of him, and placed it for Emily. He communicated to that hated



rival the information which he ought to have reserved for Francine. "The committee insist," he said, "on my proposing one of the Resolutions. I promise not to bore you ; mine shall be the shortest speech delivered at the meeting."

The proceedings began.

Among the earlier speakers not one was inspired by a feeling of mercy for the audience. The chairman revelled in words. The mover and seconder of the first Resolution (not having so much as the ghost of an idea to trouble either of them), poured out language in flowing and overflowing streams, like water from a perpetual spring. The heat exhaled by the crowded audience was already becoming insufferable. Cries of "Sit down !" assailed the orator of the moment. The chairman was obliged to interfere. A man at the back of the hall roared out, "Ventilation !" and broke a

window with his stick. He was rewarded with three rounds of cheers; and was ironically invited to mount the platform and take the chair.

Under these embarrassing circumstances, Mirabel rose to speak.

He secured silence, at the outset, by a humorous allusion to the prolix speaker who had preceded him. “Look at the clock, gentlemen,” he said; “and limit my speech to an interval of ten minutes.” The applause which followed was heard, through the broken window, in the street. The boys among the mob outside intercepted the flow of air by climbing on each other’s shoulders and looking in at the meeting, through the gaps left by the shattered glass. Having proposed his Resolution with discreet brevity of speech, Mirabel courted popularity on the plan adopted by the late Lord Palmerston in the House of Commons—he

told stories, and made jokes, adapted to the intelligence of the dullest people who were listening to him. The charm of his voice and manner completed his success. Punctually at the tenth minute, he sat down amid cries of "Go on." Francine was the first to take his hand, and to express admiration mutely by pressing it. He returned the pressure—but he looked at the wrong lady—the lady on the other side.

Although she made no complaint, he instantly saw that Emily was overcome by the heat. Her lips were white, and her eyes were closing. "Let me take you out," he said, "or you will faint."

Francine started to her feet to follow them. The lower order of the audience, eager for amusement, put their own humorous construction on the young lady's action. They roared with laughter. "Let the parson and his sweetheart be,"

they called out; "two's company, Miss, and three isn't." Mr. Wyvil interposed his authority, and rebuked them. A lady seated behind Francine interfered to good purpose by giving her a chair, which placed her out of sight of the audience. Order was restored—and the proceedings were resumed.

On the conclusion of the meeting, Mirabel and Emily were found waiting for their friends at the door. Mr. Wyvil innocently added fuel to the fire that was burning in Francine. He insisted that Mirabel should return to Monksmoor, and offered him a seat in the carriage at Emily's side.

Later in the evening, when they all met at dinner, there appeared a change in Miss de Sor which surprised everybody but Mirabel. She was gay and good-humoured, and especially amiable and attentive to Emily — who sat opposite to her at the table. "What did you and

Mr. Mirabel talk about while you were away from us?" she asked innocently. "Politics?"

Emily readily adopted Francine's friendly tone. "Would you have talked politics, in my place?" she asked gaily.

"In your place, I should have had the most delightful of companions," Francine rejoined; "I wish I had been overcome by the heat too!"

Mirabel—attentively observing her—acknowledged the compliment by a bow, and left Emily to continue the conversation. In perfect good faith she owned to having led Mirabel to talk of himself. She had heard from Cecilia that his early life had been devoted to various occupations, and she was interested in knowing how circumstances had led him into devoting himself to the Church. Francine listened with the outward appearance of implicit belief, and with the inward conviction that Emily

was deliberately deceiving her. When the little narrative was at an end, she was more agreeable than ever. She admired Emily's dress, and she rivalled Cecilia in enjoyment of the good things on the table; she entertained Mirabel with humorous anecdotes of the priests at San Domingo, and was so interested in the manufacture of violins, ancient and modern, that Mr. Wyvil promised to show her his famous collection of instruments, after dinner. Her overflowing amiability included even poor Miss Darnaway and the absent brothers and sisters. She heard, with flattering sympathy, how they had been ill and had got well again; what amusing tricks they played, what alarming accidents happened to them, and how remarkably clever they were—"including, I do assure you, dear Miss de Sor, the baby only ten months old." When the

ladies rose to retire, Francine was, socially speaking, the heroine of the evening.

While the violins were in course of exhibition, Mirabel found an opportunity of speaking to Emily, unobserved.

“Have you said, or done, anything to offend Miss de Sor?” he asked.

“Nothing whatever!” Emily declared, startled by the question. “What makes you think I have offended her?”

“I have been trying to find a reason for the change in her,” Mirabel answered—“especially the change towards yourself.”

“Well?”

“Well—she means mischief.”

“Mischief of what sort?”

“Of a sort which may expose her to discovery—unless she disarms suspicion at the outset. That is (as I believe) exactly what she has been doing this evening. I needn’t warn you to be on your guard.”

All the next day Emily was on the watch for events—and nothing happened. Not the slightest appearance of jealousy betrayed itself in Francine. She made no attempt to attract to herself the attentions of Mirabel; and she showed no hostility to Emily, either by word, look, or manner.

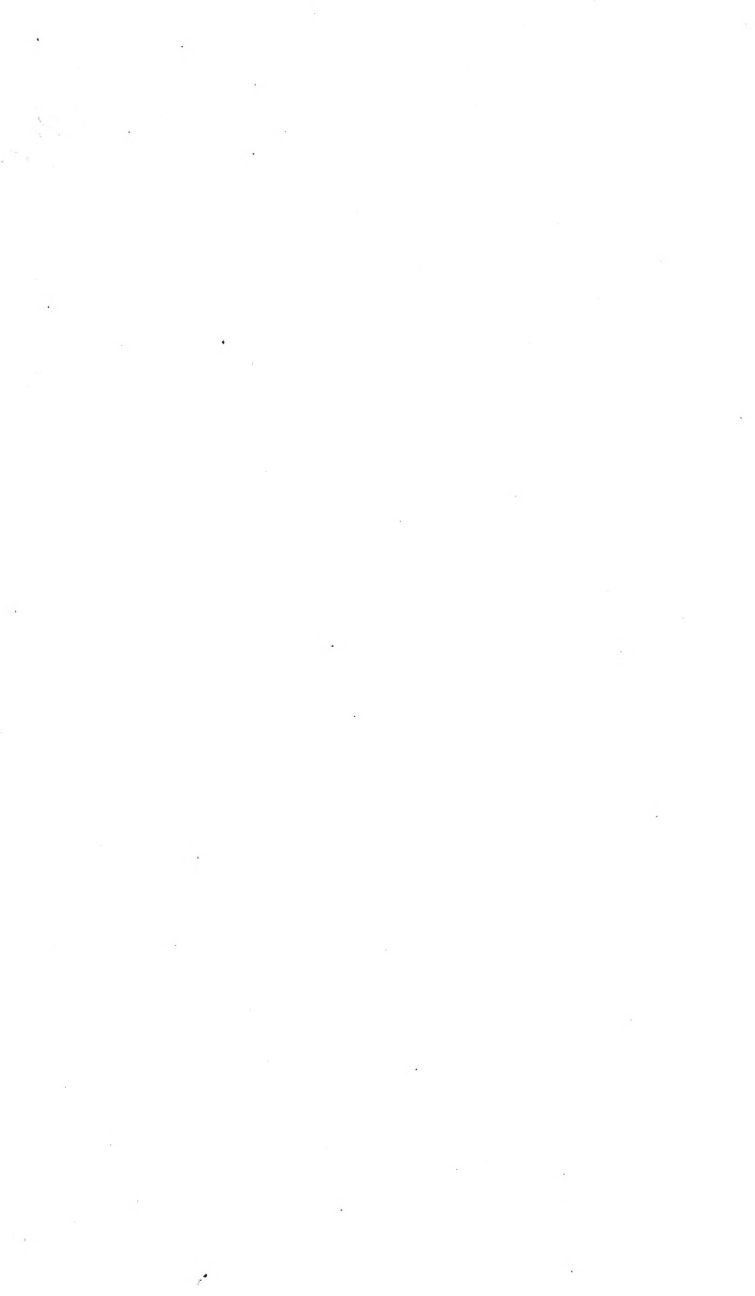
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The day after, an event occurred at Netherwoods. Alban Morris received an anonymous letter, addressed to him in these terms :

“A certain young lady, in whom you are supposed to be interested, is forgetting you in your absence. If you are not mean enough to allow yourself to be supplanted by another man, join the party at Monksmoor before it is too late.”

END OF VOL. II.









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